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THE CONVENTIONALISTS

BY

ROBERT HUGH BENSON

AUTHOR OF "THE KING'S ACHIEVEMENT," "THE QUEEN'S TRAGEDY," "RICHARD RAYNAL; SOLITARY," ETC.

ST. LOUIS, MO., 1908

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CITY OF NEW YORK

THE CONVENTIONALISTS

PROLOGUE

I SET down my bag in a kind of despair, straightened my aching back and began very cautiously to bend my cramped fingers this way and that; the pinched skin across the palm of my hand slowly readjusted itself. Yet all the while I was marvelling at the dawn of rosy nacre, the strange silence, the clean-smelling, cold, dark air and the solemnity of the empty streets.

I was doing an extremely foolish thing out of mere obstinacy. Two engagements, just not incompatible, involved my arriving, from the north, at Euston at four o'clock in the morning and my leaving Waterloo at eight o'clock; and in a fit of romantic self-will I had shaken my head at the sleepy cab-drivers and set out to walk with my kit-bag across from one station to the other. For about three-quarters of an hour I had enjoyed myself; then profound irritation, weariness and self-mockery had gained possession of my animal nature, and the conflict was now proceeding. On the one side, such appreciative *faculties as I* possess pointed out to me

the curious romance of the quiet streets, the unique experience of looking upon London asleep; on the other, my carnal appetite painted visions of a cushioned hansom, a hotel bedroom and a couple of hours' drowsy rest. But my will was obstinate. No power known to me would have availed to make me falter.

I had reached a cross-road, somewhere to the south of King's Cross, where the slope begins to rise, and for the third or fourth time set down my bag to rest. As my muscles slowly relaxed, and the quick pricking of the skin subsided to a glow, I began once more to appreciate my experience. It was really very remarkable. To right and left of me ran a long, straight street, noisy and hideous in the daytime no doubt, now as solemn as a ruined temple in the dawn. A water-cart had lately passed along this way, sweeping clean with floods of fresh water the fragments and the dust generated in the previous day, and a smell as of a country road was in my nostrils. Opposite me, and down the street in front, rose up the silhouette of chimney pots and stucco parapets, beneath which drowsed the white-blinded windows; here and there a vivid orange oblong, crossed by a monstrous shadow, showed where some yawning human creature was making ready for his day's work. The silence, too, was impressive; and the gnat-like cry of some workman's

train half a mile away, the rich, sudden clatter of a milk-cart across the end of one of these labyrinthine avenues, the hollow bang of a house-door, the approaching and receding rap of footsteps on the hard pavement, echoing back clear and distinct before fading again into stillness, the thin crow of a dawn-cock across miles of roofs — all these things did no more than accentuate the silence.

Since leaving the Euston Road, I had not seen more than a dozen persons all told, and of these not less than four had been policemen. Five more had been working men, bag on shoulder, passing briskly along to some mysterious business, scenting the air for a hundred yards behind them with the pungent black tobacco and that strange British combination of stale alcohol and unwashed clothes. One had been a drowsy boy, protruding a stick-like arm to take in the milk at a green-painted, blistered door; one had been a girl with her hair in curl-papers, who appeared to have slept in her clothes; and the last, a railway porter driving a van. I had also had a few courteous words with a sleepy but polite collie-dog.

I had learned two or three lessons already and now repeated them to myself. The first was that those persons who report that London never sleeps are liars; the second, that the sense of smell is extraordinarily refined at four o'clock in the morning,

and the third was that hideous London streets can be perfectly beautiful in an autumn dawn.

I do not think I have ever seen that sky equalled. Overhead still lay the heavy gray pall of thin cloud, visible through the smoke-clear air; but to the south-east it flushed through old-rose down to a burning red and gold and with faint blue streaks of cloud variegating it like the colors of mother-of-pearl. It was as if some unimaginable glory was a-preparing in heaven. Yet I knew perfectly well that I should be disappointed later. The promise would not be fulfilled; the colours would die, not deepen, and a drab-colored day would once more reassert itself over this splendid dawn, as surely as disillusionment succeeds to youthful love.

I suppose that persons who walk abroad occasionally at this unheard-of hour are generally inclined at such times to a priggish sententiousness. I had already been swelling with pride and superiority for half an hour; now I even went so far as to begin to reflect upon human life. Here was this great morning-secret into which I had been initiated — the secret that London sleeps and that yet the world continues! How childish, I told myself, that people should ever be bewildered with human life, or be tempted to think that man's perceptions were adequate to absolute truth! Here was *infinite air about* me, alive with some silent smiling

Presence; undreamed of space on every side flowed down again into those stone and stucco channels from which for an hour or two festering humanity had been withdrawn, as surely as the clean seawater washes up the horrible drain-pipes that run into the sand from the insignificant little village on the cliff. How strange it was that these rabbit-men and women who ran up and down those streets and who retired to snore in stuffy bedrooms when dark had fallen, should so live in the midst of mystery and yet not understand it. While I — I — a lover of the country, saw at a glance. . . .

I perceived my own revolting sententiousness, and stooped once more to take up my bag. Even as I did so a step sounded sharply up from my left, and round the corner of the house, up the road which I was about to cross, came the figure of a young man. He looked at me for an instant as he passed, at my face under my clerical hat, my long overcoat, my bag and back again to my face. Then he was gone, and his steps rang along the pavement at my right.

But I was interested in what I had seen. He is my hero. Let me describe him carefully, once and for all.

First, he was plainly a gentleman, though in a remarkable costume. He was in a long, white frieze motoring overcoat; his boots were of a proper chest-

nut color; he had his hands deep in his pockets; he wore a Trilby hat, and a "Third Trinity" woollen scarf was wrapped about his neck. He was slightly under six feet in height. What I had seen of his face was reassuring; he was no nocturnal reveler. His eyes were a clear kind of gray-blue, looking with a slightly puzzled expression out of a strangely clear complexion; his thin lips were fresh, and set in a determined line; and there had been in his face, as he had glanced at me, a kind of shy and courteous interest — neither the mask-like look of the carnal and conventional animal, nor the stupid intelligence of the fool. Later, I noticed one or two other things — that his jaw was very beautifully shaped and gave promise of extreme firmness; its lower line was almost exactly at right angles to his throat; that his nose was really straight, with sensitive, fine nostrils, and that his chin had just the shadow of a cleft in the middle.

I took up my bag, went a step or two forward and hesitated, looking after his retreating figure. Then I determined to go after him, with a vague kind of curiosity as to what he was doing abroad at that hour.

Now, I had no sort of intention of speaking to him; indeed, there was no hope of my catching him up, but I thought it would add a kind of interest

to my pilgrimage, if I followed him so long as he went in the least in my direction. I could weave imaginations about him, too, which would serve to pass the time. But at the next street corner he was delivered into my hands.

There stood at the angle a coffee-stall, just off the pavement; and a navvy had just set down his cup on the counter and was turning away. My young man, scarcely forty yards in front of me, hesitated an instant; then he dived briskly under the canvas roof, and I heard his voice requesting coffee. I, too, then followed him, set down my bag and delivered the same order.

It was a curious little place. Two men looked over the high counter raised on a platform. Behind them were shelves filled with tin boxes and crockery. A couple of steaming pots stood between us with a regiment of thick-lipped cups, and three or four loaves of bread with a basin of butter stood beside them. A kerosene-jet flared noisily just outside the shelter.

The young man and I, standing a yard apart, as monks eat their jentaculum, ate in silence. The coffee was really delicious, hot and thick. I was still meditating whether I could introduce myself by offering a cigarette, when an old man stepped round the corner of the shelter and suggested carrying

my bag for me. I told him, No, looking at his bent old body and pinched face; but that he might have some coffee at my charges.

While he ate and drank, my mind still labored on the question as to how I could speak to the young man. I really do not know why I wanted to; I suppose it must have been an unworthy curiosity as to his doings; but finally it came about in a moment. As I fumbled for the coppers I dropped two, and, after a pause of looking, the young man stooped and picked one up.

I thanked him and after finishing my payment, offered first the old man and then the young one my cigarette case. Each took a cigarette; and, as together we three went out, I turned to the young man suddenly.

"Are you going my way?" I asked, indicating the street to the left.

He smiled rather pleasantly and bowed with a kind of youthful dignity, and together we set off.

I began by remarking on his scarf.

"You are wearing what I should call 'Third Trinity' colors," I said.

"Why, that's what they are!" he said.

"That's interesting," I went on. "I'm Eton and Trinity myself."

That started him more or less, and I learned presently, though he was obviously a shy boy, that

he had just begun his third year; that he was going to the Bar (I knew what that meant); that up to to-day he had been staying with his uncle in town; that he was going down to his home, Crowston, in Sussex, that evening. All this came out gradually; he was not more than politely communicative; and I had to help him out by telling him various facts about myself. He seemed interested to learn that I too was living in Cambridge; and presently he asked me if I were a don.

I told him, No; and then I unmasked my first gun.

"I am a Roman Catholic priest," I said. "I am at the Catholic Rectory there."

There was just that pause that I have become accustomed to expect on making that announcement, and then he said something, shy and polite, about our meeting up at Cambridge perhaps.

"I shall be delighted," I said. "I never hunt people out for fear they should think I am proselytizing. But I am generally at home in the evening, if you care to look me up."

I suppose the sense of mutual loneliness, engendered by walking together through empty streets, encourages communicativeness; and by the time that we reached the beginning of the City, he had told me a good deal more, broken occasionally by that

kind of tremulous pause that I have noticed in conversations with other people who have learned that I am a priest.

Briefly, he was the second son of a country gentleman; . . . he had one brother older than himself, and another younger; . . . his parents were both alive. He rowed in the second boat of "Third Trinity"; . . . he was reading for the Law Tripos and hoped to get through. . . . He thought he liked Cambridge . . . He was accustomed to ride and shoot, but he wasn't much good at either.

As we turned off by the Mansion House, the City was awake in earnest; the romance was gone, and the drab day had taken complete possession of all things. Yet I had not so far found out what I wanted. He said something about leaving me at the entrance of the bridge, and I fired my last shot.

"Do tell me what on earth you are doing out at this hour?"

He smiled rather shyly, and flushed very faintly.

"I am just taking a walk," he said. "I was out at three and shall get back to Queen's Gate for breakfast."

"It is admirable. Do you often do it?"

"Sometimes," he said. "I like it."

At the beginning of the bridge he said good-bye.

"Don't forget," I said. "I shan't come and see you unless you come to see me first. My name is Benson; and I live at the Catholic Rectory."

"I shan't forget," he said.

All across the bridge I was revolving theories. A young man walks abroad from three to eight for one of two reasons. Either he is ill with sleeplessness, and this one was not, or he is suffering from acute romance; and in this case he is in love, of a sort, either with an idea, or with a girl, or with God.

That, then, was my first meeting with Algy Banister.

PART I

CHAPTER I

(1)

MISS MARY MAPLE was looking out of her bedroom window at Crowston shortly before half-past nine in the morning and wondering what she should talk about at breakfast. It was not an encouraging morning, for it had absolutely no distinctive character whatever. The sky was gray and dull; the grass was of a usual green; and the woods to right and left were hesitating as to whether it was still late summer or whether they should vote for early autumn, and dress accordingly; in fact, a few impulsive spirits had already decided that it was absurd to remain quite green any longer. She thought she would say this, as she fingered the curtains a moment; then she reflected that it was really too elaborate for breakfast; it might possibly serve at a genial tea. In any case she was not sure that the Banister circle would in the least understand what she was talking about.

She too stood rather in the position of the woods.

Hitherto she had been certainly summer, a pleasant, flushed-faced summer, with brown-gold hair; but she was beginning to hesitate — her age was twenty-nine. It seemed to her sometimes as if she was being hardly treated by the Authorities. Certainly she looked her part all right, in a brown tailor-made dress, upright, steady-faced, sufficiently pretty and certainly dignified. She could act it, too, and loved it. She rode magnificently, shot on occasion just well enough to make men pleased with her, was competent at golf, could drive a motor and was quite good at parlor tricks and amateur theatricals; but the difficulty was that she did not really know her spoken part. She was subject to moods which she could not control. Occasionally she felt so desperately bored that she sat almost dead-silent; occasionally she talked just too cleverly for her friends. She positively read poetry now and then and knew a few arguments of the other side. It was very hard to hit the mean.

Yet here she was planted by destiny in a succession of country houses from July to March and in town from March to July, and time was passing. She had acknowledged to herself quite frankly by now that she wanted to be married; in fact, she had known this for at least five years; and she knew also that nothing but a really comfortable kind of life would suit *her*. There must be no nonsense

about younger sons. . . . Theo Banister would have done very well. Her will, instructed by her understanding, had singled him out a year ago, and her affections had followed obediently though tranquilly; but it seemed there was no reciprocation. Theo was a perfectly harmless, proper kind of man. She had met him a dozen times in town; it was undoubtedly through his means that she had been asked here a second year in succession; and now this fool Algy had spoilt it all. It was impossible to preserve dignity with an uncouth schoolboy making eyes at her all day.

This was what she said to herself in her severer moods, on such occasions as before breakfast or immediately after lunch; but there were other times when she felt rather sorry for him. He was plainly an excellent boy; he was shy, rather incompetent — obviously considered the fool of the family — and entirely devoted. Even her irritation with him showed her interest, though she did not perceive this. If he had but been the eldest son he might really have done very well. He was a fresh, courteous boy; he would always be presentable, though not always graceful. . . . And he was coming back from town this evening.

An old retriever plodded stiffly across the gravel, took up a position on the grass immediately in front of the front door, sat down, closed his eyes rever-

ently and began to emit solemn barks, listening, as it were, to the echo of each through eternity. It seemed very significant and ceremonial. Mary smiled at him, left off twitching the curtain and went to the door.

The retriever did very well as an opening for conversation five minutes later as she sat between Theo and Harold; and she had learned presently, with an air of intelligent interest, his age, name and the principal incidents of his career, all from Harold's eager lips. Algy had shot him once, it seemed, not seriously, in the hind quarters, thinking him to be a hare in the undergrowth.

"Jolly funny sort of hare," said the boy vindictively; and then, without indicating a change of subject, "He's coming down again to-day, Miss Maple. Don't tell him I told you. He's only been up about some law business."

"The Brasteds are coming by the same train," put in Theo, reaching across for the toast, "and Jack Hamilton. You know them well, don't you?"

Mary assented.

"She's a Catholic, isn't she?" asked Harold, with large eyes.

Again Mary assented.

"She became one about five years ago," she said.

As she went across to get some cold partridge,

the sense of despair came on her again. It was all so hopelessly the same. Here was this large and comfortable dining-room, Turkey carpeted and hung with portraits of solid Victorian and Georgian Banisters. There was a black marble mantelpiece; silver dishes on the sideboard loaded with excellently cooked food; an immense hot-water urn blotting out her hostess's face. All the people, too, were exactly like everybody else. Old Mr. Banister seemed what he was, a Justice of the Peace, an admirable sportsman, a competent head of a household and estates. At first sight he looked as if he were in a perpetual passion. Mrs. Banister seconded him perfectly, performed her functions well and had about three other ideas in the world. Theo was a good third, who would make a first some day; and Harold was also what he looked, a boy of nineteen, fresh-faced, ardent and confidential. There was also another man and his wife of no importance, who were leaving that morning, and Sybil Markham, a sort of cousin of the house, a really charming girl of eighteen, looking exactly like a Gainsborough, with whom Harold was obviously in love. Then this evening there would be the Brasteds — a faint consolation — Jack Hamilton and Algy.

Yet Mary knew perfectly well that she could not be happy unless the wheels ran smoothly. Life was

tolerable in the midst of pleasant opulence — or, at any rate, it would be intolerable elsewhere. She could not imagine without horror an existence in which food was not perfectly cooked, or where other people's windows looked on to her own garden. She had had experience of it for the first fifteen years of her life, till her aunt had adopted her; she did not wish to have it again. Yet undoubtedly she would some day, when her aunt died, unless she succeeded in establishing a right of her own. Theo seemed her last chance — and Theo, in brightly colored heather-stockings, was helping himself to ham.

She went out after breakfast to see the sportsmen off, an hour later. The unimportant man and his wife had spun off on the motor ten minutes before, the beaters were assembling on the gravel at the corner, and Mr. Banister was conferring with the keeper.

Harold came out in his homespun and gaiters and stood beside her.

"We're going over there first — just through the roots," he said, pointing out to the left. "Are you coming out to lunch?"

"I believe so," said Mary sedately, knowing perfectly well why he had asked. "At any rate, Sybil and I are coming."

Harold snicked open his gun punctiliously, and looked down the barrels with a critical eye.

"I wish those other chaps would come in time," he said, "They're ten minutes late already."

Theo came out almost immediately afterwards, a similar figure, with a large flat cap set above his ruddy face, and made the same remark; and Mary stood by him, leaning against the Corinthian pillar of the porch, presenting really a charming picture there. Out here in the dull light she did not look her age; her heavy masses of brown hair shone pleasantly with underlights of gold; her face had a warm morning flush, and her eyes seemed bright and interested. Her brown-clad figure showed to great advantage against the round white column.

"I wish I was a man sometimes," she said suddenly. "How nice it must be to be dressed like that!"

This was well on Theo's intellectual level; and he made an obvious answer. It was like touching a spring.

"At any rate, I'm coming out to lunch," she said; "and I shall borrow somebody's gun for a shot or two afterwards."

She still stood watching as the group moved away at last across the grass, with the two late comers

still slightly apologetic. It was all so pleasantly picturesque; the long slope of grass crowned by pines against the sky a quarter of a mile away; the russet colored figures moving across; the band of beaters vanishing with their white flags far off to the left to take their places for the drive — all so picturesque and so suggestive. And it all so nearly belonged to her, and just did not.

Sybil came over just before they disappeared.

"Oh! I'm late," she said. "I didn't know:"

Then the two stood watching.

(II)

After the train left East Croydon for the comparative darkness of unsuburban country, Algy laid aside the "Westminster," crossed his right leg over his left, propped his cheek on his hand and his hand against the glass and settled himself down to luxurious meditation.

He was very much in love, and was delighted that he was alone in this first-class carriage; for it seemed to him almost impossible that his secret should not escape from him in a kind of luminous emanation. This past week had been intolerable to him. His Love had come to stay for a fortnight in his own home; he had seen her for two days; then he had been obliged to go up to town to his uncle's house about some business connected with

his future entrance into Law; and now there remained six days, Sunday to Friday inclusive, in which he would see her and live in her company.

It had begun in the previous summer at a ball. He had seen her before that, but she had not risen upon him, so to speak, before that fateful night. He had positively danced with her, he had been conscious of various details which he had meditated upon ever since — the warm color of her complexion, the gold lights in her hair, the shape of her hand and the extraordinary thrill of her eyes. She had been delightful to him; she had even said that she enjoyed talking to somebody who understood what she meant. He had taken her to supper and to her carriage in the early dawn. He had gone home, not yet fully understanding what had happened to him; he had laid the gloves in which he had danced at the very back of his drawer, that they might not be worn again. He had fallen asleep to the phantom music of a band; he had awakened the next morning, conscious instantly of her existence.

It was this form, then, that love took in Algy — a form of idealism that had very little to do with facts. He had passed through Eton singularly unscathed, and he still retained the capacity for clear adoration that often disappears with childhood. Nothing entered his head but this idealism. Mary *was to him* an almost wholly spiritual figure — an

intangible light radiating through a beautiful lantern. (I regret having to express it in this rather bombastic language, but I am unaware of any other. Perhaps it would be simpler at once to say that Algy's chief characteristic was an extreme purity.)

Other new things had followed that beginning, exactly as they always do. The world was the same, yet he, in company with all other youthful lovers, had looked upon it now from a new angle, and it reflected marvelous shades and tints of light. Things that had appeared dull, which he had taken for granted, took upon themselves a new kind of reality. It was as when one places an uninteresting photograph in a diorama; details and principles become rounded and objective — they fall into fresh and vivid relations one with another. He began to understand now why it was right and proper that summer woods should be beautiful and sunsets should glow with entrancing color; why the dead stillness of a country night under a sky full of stars should have a voice; what it is that sets two dogs racing and biting on dewy grass. For the first time in his life he had begun to understand that the painting of pictures and the composing of music and the writing of poetry were not mere methods of passing the time or making money, but that there was an impulse beneath them that must materialize or die. Most significant of all, perhaps, and cer-

tainly rather unusual in such cases, was the fact that he had begun to say his prayers again and found in that practice a strange and bewildering joy. For, after all, the material world was not a series of colored objects, nor the moral a series of human actions, nor time a progression, nor space an extension; but all was one spirit expressing itself under these things, itself transcendent of them and it culminated, obviously, in a vast Parental Heart, from which all took its origin and in Whose embrace all lay poised.

It seemed to Algy very remarkable that he had not been aware of all this before — even though he did not so formulate his emotions. His life, up to that June night, appeared totally bloodless and uninteresting; yet she had been in the world all that time (and, in fact, exactly eight years previously too). But all had been but as a drop-scene to a child — sufficiently interesting and yet not adequate to his desires. The painted castle and the sunset and the bulrushes — well, they were pretty tolerable, and when the lights were turned up, even charming; but the hour had struck, and the canvas had rolled up, showing by that action its own insubstantiality, and fairyland lay revealed in three dimensions instead of two — far more real even than common life because so far beyond ideals —

and in the very center of the stage a radiant Queen.

Here, then, sat poor Algy in a first-class carriage on the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway.

He first drew a number of mental pictures of the hall at home, where she would probably be sitting before the open fireplace as he came in five minutes before the dressing-bell rang. She might be in a tea-gown or she might not; but, at any rate, her hands and hair and face would be a fixed quantity. He would stand and warm his back, he thought, for a little while and talk to her, looking down on her upturned face. The dressing-bell would ring; but he would not go upstairs at once; he would wait till twenty minutes to the hour. And so would she.

Then there would be dinner; he would probably be able to sit next her and would tell her about his week in town and hear the news of Crowston. He would drink enough wine to get over his shyness, of which he was perfectly aware and which he loathed and despised. When they met again in the drawing-room, he would not go to her at once; it would be good to deny himself a little — not much, for, after all, he would be in the same room with her. Then he must give her her candle, himself. There must be no mistake about that.

To-morrow morning? Yes; he would certainly go to the early celebration; he had begun that again. It was even conceivable, though perhaps not probable, that she would come too. How extraordinarily sweet it would be if she did! They would walk across the park in the dewy light, hearing the hush of Sunday; enter the little dark Norman church; kneel within a yard or two of one another, for surely no other member of the household would be there. Together they would pass up towards the warm light of the sanctuary. . . . And if she were not there, at least he would go; he could not have too much of love. . . .

Algy did not get much beyond the immediate future. Of course he foresaw himself occasionally in his own house with her, and a child or two, all moving in golden light; but the steps necessary to this consummation — ways and means and income — he did not consider. Practically, too, he did not ask himself whether she loved him. She was kind to him; and that was all that was necessary just now. It was really impossible to him to doubt but that some day she would love him. His own emotion was so positive that the answer must certainly be there. So too must all the other necessary elements be there — a pleasant house in the country, a carriage or two, a large shady garden and nothing

particular to do. These things were as surely demanded as food and sleep, and therefore must be forthcoming. Otherwise, where is the argument from human instinct?

So there he sat and contemplated, idealizing with all his might.

He was feeling a little drowsy, for, after all, he had walked for nearly five hours at the beginning of the day, driven from his bed into the dark streets by the insistent goad of romance — and he was slightly bewildered as he stepped out on to the platform of Crowston. It was very dark, a fine rain was falling, his luggage was in an unexpected van; and it was not till he positively ran into Lord Brasted at the entrance of the station that he remembered that guests were coming down by the same train.

His first emotion was one of disappointment. It would complicate matters to have these people crowding about the house. There might even be a dinner party, which would be fatal to his schemes.

But he behaved well and stood about in courteous attention upon Lady Brasted, letting the other two men do all the running about, and sincerely apologetic as soon as the last piece of luggage had been wheeled out in charge of the man and maid. Then he climbed last into the motor and sat down on the

end of the seat nearest the door, fitting his knees in between those of Jack Hamilton, who sat opposite.

There was not much talking done on the way to the house. Algy had no conversational powers and was, besides, too full of expectation to exert himself. So the four sat in the darkness and were whirled sideways in that slightly ignominious fashion that seems inseparable for a wagonette; once they all rose solemnly together as if to adjourn a meeting, and sat suddenly down again as the car rushed over a ridge in the country road. Through the glass window on his right Algy could see the flat cap of the chauffeur and the high collar of his coat against the white glare of the acetylene and, within, the pale profile of Lady Brasted under her hat. Jack made a remark or two of no importance, and Lord Brasted volunteered a conjecture as to the horse-power of the motor. Algy was able neither to confirm nor deny his statement.

So the lodge gate was passed and the deep dip among the rhododendrons and the pond where a pale swan lay poised as above an unfathomable gulf of darkness; then came the rush out from the trees and the sight of a couple of rabbits sitting up scared in the white light across the grass; then trees again and the first view of the lighted house beneath them *in the valley,* and at that sight Algy's anticipation

rose keener yet, and he pressed his knees together tightly with his hands between them.

Getting out was a somewhat clumsy affair. Algy still had a good many corners left on him; he trod once upon Jack Hamilton's toes and slipped upon the step, and, when he was finally out, stood alone rather helplessly while the rest descended into the pleasant light from the open hall door. Then he followed them, with a strange tightening at his throat; but the hall was empty.

He hung about while the rest went through into the inner hall, dawdling over his coat, and hesitating whether or not to ask where the others were.

"Mr. Theo anywhere about?" he said at last diplomatically as the man hung up his hat.

"Mr. Theo's in the billiard-room, I think, sir."

He still hesitated, standing on the rug and spreading his hands mechanically to the blaze. Then he stepped briskly away, passed through the swing door and went down the passage towards the billiard-room.

There was a click and a whir and a loud exclamation as he opened the door.

"Fourteen, three," said Mary's voice.

But there was no kind of sensation as he made his appearance. Mary was that moment addressing herself to a stroke and made no movement beyond a slight raising and dropping of her eyes. Theo was

standing on the hearthrug chalking his cue viciously and nodded very curtly to his brother. A pair of knees and the back of a volume of "Punch" denoted that Harold was lying on his back on the leather seat by the fire. Then Mary played, cannoned, and, still without a look, passed around the table, looking earnestly at the balls. She played again, missed her stroke, and came towards him.

"So you are back?" she said. " . . . No, I missed that."

A face looked over the "Punch."

"Is Jack come?"

"Yes; and the Brasteds," said Algy, taking up his position on the middle of the hearth-rug with an odd kind of disappointment at his heart. This was not at all in accordance with his rehearsal.

"Out of the light, Algy," said Theo genially. "Miss Maple wants to mark."

It was a very depressing few minutes that followed. Harold was gone; and Theo and Mary seemed all-sufficient to themselves, entirely engrossed in their game and paying no more attention to Algy than occasionally to ask him to mark this or that. The dressing-bell rang, but he desperately hung on, watching now his brother in his Norfolk jacket and dress trousers, now making a *dreary remark* or two and studiously keeping his

eyes off the girl in the tea-gown except when he was quite certain that nobody was looking at him. Once Theo asked him whether he had settled everything all right in town, and once, by extreme dexterity, he was able to supply Mary with the chalk; but this was his sole reward. It was almost impossible to pretend that he was wanted.

"I advise you to look sharp, old chap," said Theo at last; "it's after ten too."

"Yes; I'd better go and dress," said Algy drearily.

(III)

Harold was a successful individualist. He pursued his own way, had personal relations with keepers and men-servants, saw that his errands were done, made love to Sybil, retired from the company, got the warm corners within and without doors which he wanted — he did all this and yet he was not unsociable. He had a way with him when he joined himself to his fellows that compensated for his previous self-sufficiency. He was so pleasant that his profound egotism did not matter.

Theo was his precise complement. He, on the other hand, had no intelligent existence apart from other people. He was stupendously bored when he was alone; he read no books, had no private affairs and lived only in company. It was not a brilliant

life, though it was sufficiently harmless. It comprised dressing suitably, understanding about horses and guns, behaving respectably, assenting passively to the beliefs and motives of his own people. He knew the proper moment to offer whisky, the best tailors and bootmakers, the names of distinguished actresses and the pedigree of sporting dogs. He never speculated on what did not concern him; he thought poetry to be nonsense, though he managed not to say so very often; he was bored by the supernatural, yet considered the establishment a necessary department of human life. He told coarse stories to the proper people; three years ago he had, morally speaking, mildly run amuck in London; but he had now left these things behind him with conspicuous success. "Good form" was for him the whole duty of man — a deposit of solidity was beginning to be precipitated upon him, body and mind.

Both these brothers, therefore, were exactly suitable to the life they lived. Harold was supposed to be coaching for the army; Theo was supposed to be learning the management of the estate and every autumn accompanied his father on horseback to mark trees.

Now Algy was not so happy in his vocation. He was individualistic without being self-sufficient like Harold; he was sociable without the inglorious success of Theo. He depended too much on other peo-

ple to develop his lines in loneliness; he possessed too much character to fit smoothly into wholly conventional surroundings.

This evening the smoking-room presented a kind of section of all this to the observant student of human nature.

On the right of the fire sat Old Mr. Banister, with his sunset complexion well set off by his white shirt-front and his velvet coat. He handled his cigar as an artist his paint-brush — delicately, reverently, and with apathy — administering smoke to himself and observing the progress of his ash as interestedly as a painter his picture, or a gardener an aspiring orchid. It was part of his evening's work to smoke one cigar as well as possible, to make the most of it, to appreciate every development. About four minutes after the stump had been laid aside was the proper moment for whisky, which he dispensed to experienced friends with a kind of sacerdotal seriousness.

On the chair opposite sat Lord Brasted, another veteran of the smoking-room who knew when to say what, how far praise should go, when silence was eloquent, and how far the young men should be deferred to. The two were as Knights of the Round Table who understood one another perfectly. Each deferred to each on certain subjects. Lord Brasted was the specialist on motor-cars; his host on the

management of a country estate. Each, too, had his squire this evening. Jack Hamilton sat by his cousin, in a quilted smoking-coat, his hands in his pockets, one long leg, ending in a neat sock and shoe, cocked towards the blaze, well-bred, silent and intelligent. His hair was perhaps the most characteristic thing about him. It was black, glossy, and perfectly smooth. It resembled a neat wig. It was impossible to conceive of it as ruffled. Theo sat behind his father, obviously the son of the house, ready to light the candles at the proper moment, full of shrewd comment on the somewhat limited subjects before the house, with the peculiar glazed complexion of a sanguine young man who lives out of doors. Harold was almost invisible behind the guests' chairs, his elbows on his knees, deep in "Badminton" on climbing — a sport of which he had had no experience. Thoughts of Sybil Markham moved pleasingly before him as he studied the almost incredible pictures of persons in knickerbockers ascending rocky *arêtes*. He had not spoken a word for twenty minutes.

And poor Algy sat in the middle, in a chair without arms, pulling hard at cigarettes, attempting to join in the conversation, longing to go to bed, recognizing with a kind of fury at himself that he was not in the least at his ease.

They were talking about guns just now. Lord

Brasted had asked an intelligent question, implying his own inexperience, and Theo, corroborated by his father's pontifical nods from time to time, was delivering a little discourse, helped out by anecdotes and statistics. It was all appallingly serious. The gravity was as of priests over casuistry, or doctors over a new treatment of an old disease, or artists over a new school. Some one, it seemed, had issued a treatise on the degrees of left-barrel "choke" best adapted to a variety of circumstances, illustrated by diagrams, and a controversy was in full blast in certain pink papers. Something or other, Algy gathered, was going to be revolutionized; and one part of him understood that he ought to be acquainted with such a subject. After all, he reflected, all this was a principal element in his life and engaged the absorbed attention of his elders. Yet there was another part of him that protested; and he was almost astonished at the energy of the protest.

"You see," said Theo seriously, "it's all a question of the average distance of the bird. Of course, that will vary with different people."

Lord Brasted nodded two or three times.

"You can rule out the question of walking up, nowadays," said Theo, "and that simplifies it. It's not like the old days, when the second barrel always meant from ten to fifteen yards increase of distance."

"I understand that," said the guest solemnly.

Algy sighed, rather too loudly; and his father looked at him.

But he paid very little attention, for the revolutionary sprit was uppermost just now. It seemed to him, with his newly awakened perceptions, really extraordinary that such a subject should be treated at such length. Here were four young men — for even Jack Hamilton had made a remark or two — entirely absorbed in the question. They had been talking on it for nearly twenty minutes, previously to which they had discoursed chemical manures for forty more. And this was a typical evening. As he looked back over the five years during which he had been an inmate of Olympus, he could never remember any other sort of conversation; but this was the first time that interior protest had become articulate within him. The conduct of the meeting ran on its regular lines. His father always sat in that leather chair, the principal guest opposite. The consumption of a cigar occupied as nearly as possible three-quarters of an hour, then came the pause, then the whisky; then, after a ruminative interval, the *Ite Missa est* was pronounced in an unvarying formula; and all the while these subjects were discussed in a rotatory form of argument. No particular conclusion was ever arrived at; it made no difference to anybody, ever; and yet this, it seemed,

was the recognized and approved method of spending the last hour of the day. Of course there were variations — *entrées,* as it were, between the solid courses — anecdotes occasionally of a certain character, the discussion of certain kinds of people, and the rest; but the main features were the same.

Algy sighed again.

"You're sleepy, my boy," said his father genially. "How about turning in?"

"Oh! I'm all right," said Algy hastily; and he removed his legs.

Theo was off again now, retracing his argument; but Algy, in a kind of revolt, deliberately withdrew his attention.

He had had a disappointing evening. Mary had been far from him at dinner; there was even a fern between them. He had sat next Sybil, with Harold beyond her, and the clergyman's wife on his right. It had been astonishingly dreary. The drawing-room had not been much better; he had even been reduced to examining books upon the round table, for Mary and Lord Brasted had entertained one another agreeably at the further end of the room. It was not in the least what he had rehearsed in the train, and in his very soreness he had been driven inwards. In a kind of despair he had wandered back at last into the ante-room, where obviously he was even less wanted than anywhere else, for he had

run straight into the middle of a confidential interview between Harold and Sybil, and relations between him and his brother were slightly embittered in consequence. Harold had told a genial story against him publicly during the ceremony of candle lighting. And now the heavy air of the smoking-room completed his discomfort.

What, after all, he asked himself now, as he sat waiting for the break-up, was the object of all this elaborate existence? Roughly speaking, sixteen hours in each day were consumed in laboriously doing nothing of any importance and the remaining eight in recuperating energy to spend sixteen more in the same way. Six hours of the sixteen were employed in painstaking efforts to kill something in as complicated a way as possible, about four more in consuming food, and the rest in various processes by which all these other things might be done in as perfect a way as possible — dressing and undressing, smoking, giving orders, making preparations, talking and standing about — that was really the day.

And the remarkable thing was that this was normal, not exceptional: it was the life towards which, apparently, education was directed. It was lived by all persons who could afford to do so. A man who so lived from the age of twenty-three to that of *ninety was* held by the world to have lived well.

His father so lived; Theo was beginning so to live. Younger sons lived other lives because they were younger sons and were compelled to do so.

". . . And so," ended Theo at last, " it seems to me that we shall have to make a change. Ardine Maxwell was saying so one day last week. It'll have to come."

Mr. Banister shook his head obviously, pushed his empty tumbler aside and stood up.

" Well," he said, using the formula, " how about turning in? "

Harold shut his book briskly and came forward.

" I think it's all rot," he said cheerfully. " Don't you agree, Algy? "

This was plainly derisive; and Algy too stood up uncomfortably, affecting not to hear.

" You're so jolly interesting," went on his annoying brother. " A positive babbler."

" Move there," said Mr. Banister pacifically.

CHAPTER II

"LET'S sit down a minute," said Harold.

Sybil and he had wandered away from the Sunday afternoon group on the lawn, step by step, hatless and desultory, sincerely unconscious of any purpose; they had looked at the goldfish in the stone basin below the cedars a hundred yards away; they had passed out through the wire gate and up the grassy stoop between the promontories of the trees; they had come right up beneath the whispering roof of beeches over the russet ground of last year's leaves, to the point where four rises met in the heart of the wood. Here was an aged seat set back among the rhododendrons that bordered the Little Lake, facing straight down the tunnel up which they had come, and upon it they sat down.

It had been a Sunday precisely like all other Sundays, so far. The males had come down in a long-drawn procession to find the females at breakfast, and a Sunday air had pervaded all things, generated no doubt chiefly by the substitution of trousers for knickerbockers and the drowsy memory of church bells heard an hour and a half previously There had *followed* an hour later another long-drawn proces-

sion, through the gardens and down the park, to the church half a mile away — a procession whose head, consisting of Mr. Banister, Mary and Sybil, had appeared in church three minutes before service began, and whose tail, brought up by Harold himself, had finally caused a reverent turning of heads towards the end of the *Venite*. Mr. Banister's brother was a Dean, and Crowston therefore was accustomed to see the squire's pew tolerably full.

There had followed the usual indescribably languid return, via the kitchen-gardens, back to the house, where Lady Brasted rushed out to meet them, returned five minutes before in the motor in which her husband had driven her to mass at Heron's Ghyll. The meditative groups had formed and reformed on the terrace in the golden noon sunshine till the roar of the gong had drawn them indoors to satisfy the customary Sunday hunger, and then once more nothing particular had happened except the departure of the motor with three or four of the party.

Harold had hung about with some anxiety until he heard Sybil's clear little voice announce that she would prefer to stroll about, and he had then hurried back to the smoking-room for a decent interval, whence he had viewed her alone on the terrace. He discerned his opportunity and took it, and here they were.

"He's rather a pious beggar, old Algy," said Harold, resuming his thread. "He was at church early this morning, you know."

Sybil began to arrange brown leaves at her feet with the end of her sunshade.

"Not my line, you know," he went on with a grandly tolerant air, "though I have no objections to it."

A wood-pigeon in some rustling tower of leaves overhead began a-cooing and stopped abruptly as if he had suddenly thought of something else.

"I say, Sybil, when are you going away?"

"Oh — er — Tuesday," said the girl deliberately, still engaged upon her pattern.

Harold sighed softly.

"Why can't you stop a bit longer?" he demanded.

Sybil finished her design.

"There," she said.

Harold looked at it with ill-disguised impatience.

"Why can't you stop a bit longer?" he repeated.

"Because I've got to go home," she said, with the same annoying deliberateness.

Harold began to swing a foot.

"I believe you're pleased to go," he said.

Sybil looked at him with a sort of critical interest. The circumstances made her feel very grown-up in-

deed; she thought she was behaving with admirable discretion.

"Of course, I'm always pleased to go home," she said.

Harold, too, was enjoying himself, though he told himself he was not. Sybil was always like this now. A year ago they had been excellent friends. They had ridden together like two boys, talking incessantly at the tops of their voices, arriving late for meals, flushed and excited, vanishing again on mysterious affairs at the earliest opportunity. That had all been as natural as possible. Then a color had come into their relations, as faint and yet as decisive as the first tint of sunset across the normal blue of the sky, and Sybil's behavior had instantly shown a change of complexion. Harold's first shock had been in the previous Christmas holidays, when he had demanded that Sybil should accompany him to the roof of the house at midnight to see the old year out. He had been aware of a certain thrill of excitement as he had made his request (for he had asked nobody else to come with them), and he was quite startlingly disappointed when she had refused. It was from that fatal night that Harold dated his sorrows. She had been really tiresome ever since then, he told himself in despondent moods.

Yet at the same time he was aware that her companionship gave him quite a new kind of pleasure. Four years ago, when she had first come to Crowston, on the footing of a sort of third-cousin-by marriage-who-needed-companions-of-her-own - age, he had been bored by the feminine intrusion; then there had developed friendliness, and finally this new relationship that was quite different from all else. She came about twice a year, but he had never felt quite the same sort of dismay at the prospect of her departure. And here she was now being as tiresome as ever, and there were only two days more. He racked his brain for reproaches.

"I think you might be more decent," he said, "considering there's only to-morrow left."

"What *do* you mean?"

She was looking at him with her grave Gainsborough, high-browed eyes, and was astonished to see the annoyance suddenly become real.

"Oh! this is too much," he said, and stood up.

She became aware then that it was something else that annoyed him, and, following his eyes, saw a figure walking very fast towards them down the sun-frecked ride, swinging a stick.

There was no hope for it. Algy must come right up to them. There was no other way. She only hoped he would not be tactless enough to stop.

The incessant bickerings between these two were beginning to distress her. Besides, it was rather distressing to her to see the way in which the elder always got the worst of it.

Algy marched upon his doom unheeding.

"I say, I've lost Toby," he said, a dozen yards away. "You haven't seen him?"

Harold said nothing, but looked vindictive.

"He went after a rabbit," went on Algy genially, unconscious of offense.

"I wish you would go after a rabbit," said Harold bitterly.

"You needn't be offensive, anyhow," snapped Algy, flushing and moving off.

Harold uttered a short laugh.

It was characteristic of these two to speak in detached symbols. All connecting phrases had, through long interchanges, become eliminated. One brother played a counter and the other another, and the game ended in a manner bewildering to the outsider who did not know the game and saw nothing decisive arrived at. But Sybil had seen these two in company sufficiently often to understand the rules. In this case Algy had been off his guard, Harold had attacked effectively, Algy resisted clumsily, and Harold made a swift sign of victory. That was all.

She waited until the homespun figure vanished

round the turn of the tunnel, and while his footsteps among the leaves were still audible she spoke, fidgeting with her sunshade and looking down.

"You were offensive, you know," she said.

"Well, why can't the beggar keep away?" burst out Harold. "He's always running his nose in everywhere."

Sybil was silent. She knew perfectly well that her sympathies were with this one; he was so much more easy and brisk and attractive. Algy always had been a little clumsy and apart from this world. But she was sorry for him, too.

"I don't know what's the row with him," said Harold again. "He doesn't seem to belong somehow. He was just like that at Eton, too."

"You have left, haven't you?"

He nodded.

"Yes; end of last half. Going up to the House next month."

They were in smooth water again now. Harold sat down once more in the warm gloom, and the two talked as before. The conversation would not have been worth reporting. It was of the kind that twenty thousand couples of boys and girls alone know how to carry on; it was not about anything in particular; it circled round small events and returned always to the same two centers, to Her or to *Him.* She was clever and he was clumsy, she par-

ried and he attacked, she was mistress of the situation and he was not master. A small, panting, wiry-nosed dog ran into them of a sudden out of the bushes with the air of a privileged poacher, lay down on an outskirt of the girl's dress, and cleaned himself; and she paid him ostentatious, physical attentions, but her patting and pulling were purely mechanical, and the dog understood it, though the boy did not. They looked really charming, these two, framed in the dark green of rhododendrons; flecks of warm sunlight moved on her white dress and his brown holland; faint woodland sounds — the crowing of pheasants, the buzz of flies, the breathless patter of a reconnoitering rabbit, the liquid rush of a coot across the pond behind them — these made melody in the air about them.

Toby was satisfied after a while, though he had omitted to clean the bridge of his nose, and, sighing, displayed a pinkish stomach to the breeze, lulled by the warmth and the sounds and the protective human fellowship, and it was not until, hot in pursuit of a dream-rabbit, he began to kick violently among the dry leaves that Sybil remembered that tea would be ready on the lawn.

"Darling, wake up," she said suddenly to the terrier. "Time for tea!"

They went *down together* very slowly, walking

about a yard apart, she trailing her sunshade with a pleasant rustling behind her, he with his hands in his jacket-pockets, eying this and that on either side, regretting that the afternoon was gone.

It was not that he had any definite programme; he was a much younger son, she had about twopence a year of her own and no prospects; but his dreams so far as they were formulated took the form of an income in the City and a small house in Kensington. There was no reason why that should not be reached five years hence.

"What are you going to do after tea?" he asked as they passed up towards the big cedar.

"I must go to my room," she said.

(II)

Algy had passed a lonely afternoon, and had enjoyed himself vastly until his encounter with Harold. Mary had gone in the motor so, obviously, the best thing to be done was to go into the deep woods and think about her. He had called at the stables for Toby, since Toby would not require any conversation, and had gone straight across the park behind the house to a certain pine-topped slope above the village.

It was really a superb afternoon, and he passed a very pleasant hour among the trees, lying on the *needles,* smoking a couple of cigarettes and looking

out through the mellow air between the ruddy stems down to the red-roofed village and squat Norman church that drowsed in the hazy sunlight half a mile away and below. Toby was, after all, a slight distraction, since it was necessary to see that he did not stray, but when Algy had seen him completely settled down with a noise like the panting of a small and feverish steam-engine to the excavation of an almost indefinitely deep rabbit-hole, he gave himself up to tranquil meditation.

This turned, of course, chiefly upon Mary. It was pleasant to have, as it were, a center to which he could withdraw from all those other rather annoying persons who interrupted his actual intercourse with her, and he pleased himself with constructing endless settings in which he and she should some day live in uninterrupted bliss. This was a long business and involved many side-issues. He considered the kind of house where they should live, the course of life, the hours for meals, the arrangements of the rooms — in fact, all the tiny details and none of the principles.

In the course of this he dwelt for a little on the people staying in the house, looking at them with wonder — at Lord Brasted, that stout and genial nobleman who should have been born a chauffeur, a man who had found his vocation for the first time with the invention of automobiles; his wife, that

zealous convert to Popery, in itself a strange and impossible religion, who stood like a distinguished arum-lily with its head on one side, and a red-crossed prayer-book; on well-bred Jack, who said nothing and did less and yet appeared to fulfill almost perfectly some undefined function in life, since every one was pleased with him. His own family, too, came under review, persons of activity and energy who accomplished nothing. He reviewed his meditation of the previous evening. And, finally, there was himself.

Now, it was perfectly true that he, too, did nothing particular; but he had discerned, at any rate, what was to be done. He was to marry Mary. This, again, he perceived was, strictly speaking, not anything superficially different from what his father had done and what the other males of his acquaintance had done or would do. But it was Mary that made the difference. To marry Mary was to be, rather than to do; and Doing, after all, is only of value so far as it contributes to Being. This, then, is the point of existence, he perceived. To Be.

. . .

At this point he thought that he had made a new discovery, and sat up to congratulate himself upon it. And overhead, like a ruined roof, the dusky fans expanded into the clear liquid of the sunlit air, and

beneath him drowsed the village, and about him was the breathing life of a myriad beings of every order, from the stubborn root of the pine beneath his knees to the energetic hind-quarters of Toby, half disappeared into a sandy pit a dozen yards away. . . . *Being,* he said to himself again; and what is that? . . .

Algy made quite a number of discoveries that afternoon, formulating to himself, under the stimulus of his sentiments, a quantity of thoughts hitherto only half-perceived. It was not strange that Religion, dogmatic and emotional, was the frame of many of them, and even more than the frame. His rediscovery of God, a couple of months before, had been a real experience, and to-day he saw, after a manner unfamiliar to him, that the Creator was not so wholly disconnected from Creation as he had been accustomed to believe. There was plainly something, he thought, holding all together, as force held matter, and since included with matter was conscious Being, included also with force must be something that was, at the lowest, conscious Being. Of course, Mary was his microcosm. It was she herself that gave such infinite value to her hands, her eyes, her hair, to her buckled shoes and the faint scent of her dress, even to her door at night as he

went past it on tip-toe. Then what, the solemn metaphysician asked himself, gave value to her? . . .

He relaxed his clasped knees as he put this question to himself and lay back once more, staring up with his clear, puzzled eyes, under his tilted Panama, into the clear sky, crossed now and again by black specks of sentient being called gnats. . . . Why then, he said, this is the point of God's existence — to give an eternal and infinite value, as well as an origin, to all that is. Such was Algy Banister's first glimpse of the Absolute. . . .

It must have been nearly four o'clock before he moved. Toby, wearied at last of his pathetic quest after the Absolute Rabbit and lying all abroad under a bracken fan, rose and stretched each hind leg, trembling with tenseness, to an almost incredible length in a dog so small, before trusting himself to face a further walk; but Algy hardly noticed him. The world to him had that strange aspect of unreality which it always wears after prolonged and drowsy thought in the open air, but it seemed sacramental as well, an unsubstantial presentment of something else.

He went briskly along the mossy ride, seeing on his left the blue landscape rise and fall with his steps beyond the saplings and on his right the deep humming woods, only half-conscious of the excursions

of the refreshed Toby, who with a furtive, interested air scurried in and out of the undergrowth. He felt that he had arrived at profound truths — truths, whose bases and shaggy sides he had seen before amid cloudwreaths of distraction, now visible and soaring into the illimitable sky. He had seen them more than once during his silent London walks beneath the flushing dawn, when there seemed to be a space and a stillness about him not usually obtainable. I do not think he was a prig; he did not believe himself especially favored, or especially pleasing to every one: he only regarded with interest what he seemed to see.

At about a quarter of a mile from the Little Lake he became aware of the absence of Toby; but it was useless to spend time over him. He whistled half a dozen times; he went back a few steps; he listened to the autumn hum of the woods. Then he passed on, unknowing, to his encounter.

He was extremely angry as he left the two again, and strode down towards the house. Harold was not usually so offensive in company. What made it worse was that he knew that he himself had been to blame to some extent. Yet also he knew that an interruption of that kind from Theo would not have even tempted Harold to annoyance. Here was a new train of thought, or rather an old one retrodden. He asked *himself* hopelessly, as his wrath

subsided, why it was that he was never at his ease and in what lay the secret of his clumsiness. There was his younger brother, fully as brusque as himself, yet somehow accepted in company as a pleasing addition. There was Theo, far heavier, he knew well enough, in perception and intuition, yet always a tolerable companion. Above all, he despaired when he thought of Jack Hamilton, of his well-bred tact, his unruffled severity and his well-brushed hair.

In a kind of passion of angry introspection he wheeled off once more opposite the garden gate and turned up among the bracken at a point whence he could command both the garden entrance on one side and the carriage drive on the other (it might be that the motor party would return for tea), and threw himself down there once more.

The Absolute seemed retired once more beyond the sky; there was no Unity anywhere. Being was all very well, but Doing unfortunately was its expression; and if Doing was a series of blunders —

He soothed himself once again by a visualization of Mary and by a passive yielding of himself to the fragrant peace of the woods and looked out comparatively at peace twenty minutes later, himself unseen, at Harold and Sybil accompanied by the terrier, as they passed within fifty yards of him.

"*Don't* forget to-morrow morning, then," said

Harold as he opened the gate; "they'll be off by ten, and then —"

The clash of the gate drowned the rest, and a murmur only followed as the steps went up the gravel path towards the house. But even the half sentence deepened his loneliness.

He lay there an hour more, till the evening breeze stole up from the west and set the bracken a-shiver. Tea did not matter, he told himself; besides, he could have some when the motoring party returned. Meanwhile he would like to get to the bottom of his meditations. But there was no sound from the hill down which the wheels must come; and there did not seem any more material to formulate beyond the fact that God was the Absolute and gave its value to everything. It sounded trite put into words, but he was deeper than words, and knew it. He had hold upon something, he thought, of which the crowded physical life of the woods, his own long, pulsating limbs and breathing lungs, even the very images formed by him of the Unimaginable were but the fringe of a superficies. The restlessness generated by that thought and the chilly breath across the fern combined to make him sit up. No; he would not go back to tea; he would take another round and be back before sunset.

Then his own hand on his own knee attracted his

attention — sinewy, brown and long fingered. That too, then, signified something — some tiny detail of thought from the Absolute Mind. He looked at his fingers wonderingly, and instantly thought of Mary's. Then the train of ideas was broken and he stood up, stretching himself, till his muscles cracked and the blood rushed to his head. Yes; he would have another walk and go back to the house presently.

It was all terribly unhealthy!

(III)

It is time to be more explicit about Mrs. Banister, and that is a difficult task. She may best be pictured by a series of negations. She was not handsome, nor tall, nor clever, nor stout; neither was she repulsive, nor short, nor stupid, nor thin. She was a kind of Least Common Multiple of the female nature. Perhaps the two positive things that can be said of her was that her front teeth slightly protruded and that she was possessed of a certain placidity, and even that was more the negation of irritability than an actual virtue in itself. People became aware of its presence, as of an invisible rock, when waves of circumstance beat against it in vain.

When tea was over on this Sunday evening she remained in her chair, while one by one the others dispersed. It is to be presumed that a succession of

thoughts passed through her mind, and, if so, it may be assumed that they were of a disconnected and unemotional nature.

She became aware, after a certain period, that the garden gate leading down the grass avenue to the village clashed; and looking in that direction with her pale blue eyes she descried a minute or so later, the white figure of Sybil, alone, moving slowly upwards towards the woods.

A train of thought was ignited — or rather it began gently to smoulder . . . Harold . . . Theo and Mary . . . incomes . . . professions . . . Algy . . . she paused on the last point, for he always puzzled her a little, contemplated almost passively his faint air of Ugly Duckling, wondered where he was; then, as a relief, passed on again to Harold and his brisk activities . . . his homespun suit . . . his sunburning. . . .

At six o'clock the bells began from the church half a mile away among the trees. It was very Sunday evening. The light was actually golden; the park, with its long grass-slopes seen beyond the terrace and the trooping woods above, had that appearance of extraordinary opulence of life and tranquillity that seems the peculiar possession of English estates. High above the pines against the sky, beneath which Algy had meditated this afternoon,

specks wheeled and dropped, and a solemn vesper cawing began from the elms behind her.

A door shut somewhere ten minutes later, there was the sound of footsteps on gravel, and she saw moving churchwards through the gardens two maids escorted by a man. All this vaguely contented her, especially as she did not propose to go to church again herself. It was plainly her duty to wait for the motor-party. Then she wondered when the party would be back and thought she would go indoors, as the shadow of the house had already reached her.

About ten minutes later, as she rustled slowly up the first flight of stairs, she heard a sound that made her pause to see whether by any chance it was the throb of the motor coming down the drive. But, instead, it was quick steps coming up the stone stairs that led up from the garden into the house, up which she herself had just come, and an instant later Sybil came through and stopped suddenly, looking up at her.

The girl's face was strangely white, and her lips shook.

"Mrs. Banister," she said breathlessly. Then she suddenly sat down on one of the hall-chairs.

"My dear!" cried the elder lady, and rustled down again. But Sybil was up, looking at her with an odd tremulousness, putting out her hands.

"It is all right," said the girl, still in that breathless voice. "He's all right now . . . they're bringing him along. He's all right."

A door banged overhead, and before Mrs. Banister could speak the cheerful voice of Harold broke in from overhead. But his mother had turned and was looking, with rather a bewildered apprehensiveness, at a small procession of three who appeared at that moment coming through the wide door at the head of the garden stairs up which Sybil had run just now.

The footman, whom Mrs. Banister had seen just now on his way to church, came first, carrying a battered Panama hat. Algy came next; and behind him fluttered a pale housemaid in her Sunday clothes.

Algy looked rather odd and swayed a little as he came; but he resolutely turned aside the footman, who seemed to wish to support him, and came forwards across the stone-flagged passage. He certainly looked odd, extremely white, with various stains about his nose and mouth and very bright eyes, of which one was a little bloodshot.

"My dear boy," said his mother, perturbed as a cow might be at a waved handkerchief — perturbed, not agitated.

Algy made a little gesture; but it had in it a touch of triumph as well as of bewilderment.

"I'm all right, mother," he said rather hoarsely, and his eyes wandered to Sybil, who was standing again looking at him.

"By George!" came a genial voice from the stairs. "What's the matter with your nose, old man?"

A sound broke from the girl's mouth.

"I'm all right," said Algy again. "A blackguard — Miss Sybil will tell you."

He went on, smiling in a strange one-sided way, as if he was a little drunk, and put his hand on the banister; but there was still an air of triumph.

"I'll just go and wash this off," he said, with a desperate attempt at off-handedness, and began, still holding to the banisters, to mount the stairs.

"My dear boy!" said his mother feebly. "What have you been doing?"

"She'll tell you," he said.

But Mrs. Banister went after him; and the two below stood in dead silence, listening to a murmur of question and answer ascending.

Then Harold made a grotesque face of bewilderment; and the next instant Sybil was down on her chair, sending out peal after peal of hopeless, hysterical laughter.

She struggled to stop.

The footman, who was still standing respectfully *alert,* holding the straw hat, suddenly looked down

his nose and was presently gone. Harold stared, amazed at his success. The door from the outer hall opened — no one had heard the arrival — and Mary and Theo came through and stopped, astonished. The voices of the Brasteds were heard from outside.

And still the hall rang with laughter. Sybil, with her head back and her hands clutching her sides, rocked and swayed with it; tears were streaming down her cheeks, and still she laughed; through it came words, terribly distinct, disconnected, and spasmodic. . . .

"He looked so funny — so funny — it was in the road — the man knocked him down — rude to me — I ran away — he came after — his hat — his hat. Then you made that face — oh! he looked so funny —"

This was real hysteria; and Mary was on her like a cat, shaking, scolding, frowning; then suddenly Harold laughed too, one loud roar, and stopped, portentously grave, as Theo stepped forward.

It was one of those scenes that fall without warning from the sky, utterly unexpected and irresistible. It was a combination of circumstances that must have their way; and certainly Algy had looked extremely ludicrous. And still Sybil rocked and moaned with laughter on the chair, and Mary shook and scolded.

Harold, in a kind of desperate discretion, looked vaguely upwards, and then, for the first time, appeared to realize that Algy must have heard it all; for, as he looked, he saw him turning away from the gallery overhead, with his mother still beside him, and there was an odd look on that queer, one-sided face.

Harold still stood a moment, conscious of a very clear stab at his heart and understanding, as in a kind of intuition more than from Sybil's sobbing words, what it was that had happened. He perceived that Algy had behaved decently for once — so he would have expressed it — and that he had behaved extremely badly in laughing. He understood that Sybil had been insulted and that Algy had fought for her; and in a kind of fury of contrition and indignation, and even envy, he turned and ran upstairs, just as the Brasteds appeared from the outer hall.

Algy's room was in a dark passage opening out of the gallery above the hall, and Harold, running along it, almost ran into his mother. She appeared to be standing at the door, trying the handle. Then she shook it.

"My dear boy," she said for about the fifth time. "Let me in. . . . You must bathe your face."

There was no answer. Harold, breathing beside *her in the dusk,* heard from the hall beneath one last

sobbing bubble of laughter, and then Mary's voice, very stern and severe.

"Let me in," said Mrs. Banister again.

(He listened intently, ashamed and miserable; but there was no sound.)

"I shall fetch your father," she said.

A very deliberate voice, rather hoarse, came from within the room:

"Mother, please go away. . . . I will wash my face and come very soon."

"Will you have some arnica?"

"No, thank you."

Mrs. Banister released the handle and moved off, still gravely perturbed with silence; and Harold, standing alone, heard her voice mingling itself with Mary's in admonition.

He waited a moment, still listening to the silence within, rather agitated and ashamed, and indignant too that it was Algy who had fought for Sybil and not he himself. He thought he heard the bed creak, as if some one had thrown himself upon it; then once more silence. He bent his ear to the door:

"Algy," he said. "Algy, old man."

There was no answer.

"Algy," he said again.

Then there was a movement and a footstep. The key was turned, and Algy stood there in his shirt-sleeves, his hair tumbled into a kind of absurd

plume, and a white, miserable anger in his face.

"Kindly let me alone," he said. "I want no one. I heard you laugh."

"But, Algy—"

The door banged straight in his face.

Harold stood a moment, furious at the reception. Then he kicked the door.

"All right," he snarled; wheeled and went away, crushing down his shame with both hands.

(IV)

Algy hardly knew how to face his family at dinner; and yet it had to be done. He could not correlate his thoughts, or decide upon his internal attitude. A number of apparently irreconcilable elements had somehow to be combined. He had behaved well; that seemed to him one fact; he, with his hands in his pockets, had, by the merest chance, strolled out through the gate in the park-paling through which Sybil, also intent on a lonely walk, had passed two minutes before, and he had been just in time to catch a young man in gaiters with a lurcher-dog attempting, apparently, to kiss Sybil. Algy had not reflected for a single instant; he had hit the young man, without a word, as hard as possible under the ear; and the next instant he had seen stars and stripes. He had retained sufficient consciousness to call to Sybil to run and had then, with

fury nerving him, attempted to defend himself. But the next few moments had passed in a whirling manner, during which two or three times he had seen a red face and struck at it and had himself been battered and knocked from side to side. Finally, at some sound presumably, as Algy sat among the nettles, the young man had disappeared into the woods on the other side of the road, after kicking Algy's hat contemptuously into the air. Algy had followed Sybil after a minute or two, had found her very white and shaking and had walked with her home, almost in dead silence.

Well, that was one fact: he had behaved well; and the next fact was Sybil's laughter, followed by Harold's.

He had heard the comments too — that he had "looked funny." There were moments when he lay on his bed, when he told himself she was simply hysterical; there were other moments when he preferred not to think so and to let his resentment have full and passionate play. Then there was Harold and his snarl at the door. Then there was the consciousness of having been badly beaten by the young man — the hat-kicking was a sign of that; then there was a sensation that he had bragged to himself in silence and had expected to be treated as a hero.

All this, combined with a teasing headache, a

smarting lip, an aching nose and a knowledge that he "looked funnier" than ever as the bruises darkened and puffiness emerged made him extremely sullen and unhappy, from an instinct to keep some protection over his sensitiveness. Worst of all, there was an intense consciousness of Mary and an expectancy towards her attitude.

He looked his very worst as he came down to the drawing-room and found her there.

And she, when she saw him come in alone, saw only his sullenness and his mauled face. She thought he should not have come down looking like that — he should have dined upstairs, as Sybil was doing. It looked so very unpleasant. Then she made an effort and came a step nearer to him, looking away.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Algy," she said. "I hope you aren't in much pain."

He mumbled something, overcome with sudden delight.

"Sybil's not coming down," she said, unable to keep her eyes off that crushed-looking mouth. "She asked me to thank you again. Have you any idea who the man was?"

"A poacher from London, I expect," he said thickly. "I sent to the keepers to tell them."

Then there was silence. Algy put his hands in his pockets and took them out again.

Then Mr. Banister came in, and there was cheerful rallying and the names of heathen gods and threatenings against the young man in gaiters and recommendations to learn boxing before next time and a clap or two on the shoulder, and Algy's soul retired back again into the very inmost depth of his consciousness and lay there, like a rabbit in a burrow, nervous and alert, at the tramplings overhead.

Harold ignored him that evening, but finally thrust a lighted bedroom candle, with careful nonchalance, into his hand — an unusual attention. Theo said a word or two and then talked dispassionately about poachers in general. Mrs. Banister made another remark or two about arnica and advised him to go to bed early. Mary looked at him several times, but said no more. The other guests made polite inquiries and expressed indignation.

It was not a pleasant evening for Algy. He thought he caught a footman breathing contempt of him as he handed him salad. He sat and listened to the talk, vaguely disappointed that it was not about him, yet feeling what he hoped. It was not at all as he had expected; it was not as it would have been if one detail had been reversed, and it had been he

who had thrashed the young man, and not the young man him.

He waited a moment or two in the hall, holding his candle, until the others had dispersed. Then he went to bed.

He could not sleep; his head ached too savagely; and he was thinking too violently.

His mind went over and over what had happened. In the fragrant darkness he saw again and again the hateful red face and the whirling fist, clear against the tender green and gold of the sunset woods, and felt the shock of the blows. He saw every detail of the puttee-gaiters climbing the fence to escape, the wrecked hat lying in the dust. He saw the little scene in the inner hall and heard Sybil's sobbing exclamations of how "funny he looked," and Mary's scolding! and he saw, too, Mary's embarrassed face congratulating him.

He dropped off now and again into a feverish doze, in which the phantoms of his mind materialized into a horrible reality, and he flinched from the fist and awoke again to the heavy beating of the pulses in his nose and lips and temples. And all the while, gradually, far down in his mind, below imagination and visualized shapes, a certain consideration took form.

I find it hard to describe it exactly, for Algy was

never a good relater; but it was something of this kind — certainly a platitude, but new enough to him.

He began to see that the value of his act lay in its intention and that the disagreeable detail that he had been worsted, instead of spoiling, rather enhanced the value. He saw that this was the real thing — that he had attempted to save this girl from an annoyance; and that the other things did not matter.

That was simple enough; but the next perception of his was deeper. It was that Mary and the rest did not entirely understand this. Of course, they recognized it; that was why they had tried to be pleasant; but he saw that they did not give full value to the fact, that his act lost real grace in their eyes through not being successful and that the ignominy of his having been absurdly thrashed really weighed in their minds against his attempt.

And, yet further, he began to see that the whole incident was a kind of test-case of their condition and that, while they all gave real weight to the ignominy, they did not give equal weight.

As he turned from side to side on the cool pillow he began to draw up a kind of list.

At the very bottom, I regret to say, he put his mother. She seemed to see nothing at all except the physical bruises *on his* face. She had said some-

thing pleasant, of course, but it was purely conventional. What she really considered of importance was arnica.

Next came Theo. He had just recognized the gallantry of the attempt, but he obviously regretted the whole thing extremely and had tactfully talked about poachers in general. It was absurd that a Banister should be mauled by a single man on his own estate.

Next came his father. He too had congratulated him; but he had whisked off into fury against the poacher and the need of learning boxing.

Next came Harold. That boy was obviously ashamed of himself, and that was more eloquent than congratulations. Yet he had laughed; he had kicked the door! he had shown contempt.

And last and highest came Mary — for he dismissed Sybil as a hysterical child, with no judgment at all. Mary, without doubt, had given real and deliberate weight to the intention of the act. She had flinched at the sight of his mouth; she had wished that he had been successful; but there had been the clear consciousness of the other element — a more instinctive consciousness. He perceived, then, that Mary was the nearest to understanding what he did.

As for the guests, he put them in brackets, as it *were.* Both Jack and Lady Brasted, he thought,

were probably nearly up to Mary's standard.

Of course, it was improper that Algy should have been so analytical. He should have given them all equal credit for understanding; but there it was. He saw it: he was feverish and in pain, and he formulated it.

It was obvious that such circumstances should have added a fact to those he had collected during his afternoon meditations; but it was a fact of a good deal of significance too, when it is considered what the end of Algy was. He perceived now plainly that there are two views of the world that may be taken: first, that the important thing is to preserve the conventions, to box well, to be successful, to keep up appearances, to retain society in its conservative mould; and the second, that there is a mysterious quest to be followed, that there is a certain far-distant object to which way must be made, regardless of obstacles, and that, if conventions fall in ruins about the trampling traveler and the most precious domestic ideals be upset, yet that he must continue to trample.

All this, of course, fitted in with what he had thought this afternoon; in a certain sense it clenched it and remained with him.

The curtain fluttered in the night breeze at his window, and he fell asleep.

Downstairs they still talked about poachers.

CHAPTER III

(1)

LADY BRASTED was a very picturesque person and was subconsciously aware of it. She did not actually say to herself, "This is graceful: therefore I will do it," but, practically it came to that. She was still well under thirty and looked much less, and she found even her relation to her red-haired, stoutish husband, who was a radiant fifty, picturesque on that account. It had a suggestion of young ivy and middle-aged oak. As a child she had been deliberately *ingénue,* encouraged to it by her mother, who also had an eye to suitability. She had had one incident which very nearly made her sincere — a short and violent love-story with an adventurer called Christopher Dell; but she had survived this and managed to fit it all into the picture. A new incident was to her as an ornament that must find its place; she carried it about, looking round her, and finally placed it somewhere — occasionally on a high shelf; and this love incident was as a grim, slaughtered head frowning suggestively from a dark

corner. It really looked well so long as the light did not fall full upon it.

Five years before she had suddenly discovered the extreme gracefulness of the Roman Catholic religion and had, so to speak, furnished her rooms afresh with a prie-dieu or two, visible yet modest, inlaid with colored woods, and a slender crucifix of ivory and pearl upon her writing-table. She was not exactly play-acting. She selected that religion deliberately as the theory by which in future she intended to live. She was seen on Saturday afternoons, in a veil, at Farm Street and might be observed, after her confession, a graceful bowed figure, praying, really praying, before Our Lady's altar.

All this shed a new and very exquisite light upon the whole of her life. She began to think she was spiritually minded. She began to wonder whether it was not really perhaps true, as her friends told her, that her coming into a room brought with it, quite unconsciously to herself, a certain indefinable fragrance and purity. Her part began to be that of suggestive silence. She was aware that sometimes amid the most frivolous conversation her eyes had a far-away look without her intending it in the least. She began to think that even she, perhaps, might do a little to Help others, particularly young men. As

for her husband, "dear old George," of course he was very straight and sturdy; but he did not — did not quite *understand.* Oh, yes! he was all that was dear and good and honest; but he was a Protestant, you see, and so — well, of course, you understand.

She was perfectly right about George. He was indeed a Protestant, with a strong conviction of the commonsense of the Establishment as interpreted by confidential bishops in the arm-chairs of the Athenæum. He had even opened Church bazaars, he had been lured, with much delicate and flattering diplomacy, to appear at an Albert Hall Demonstration, and he regarded the little that he understood of his wife's religion with good-humored contempt. He attended Church on Sundays in the country; he thought himself the very type of the Sensible Layman and regarded the next world as through the door of the Georgian mausoleum that rose gloomy among cypresses on his estate at Esher — a fact which was best treated with a discreet melancholy.

And Jack, who had been brought up with Annie Brasted, occupied an indefinable position between them. Not his dearest friends had the faintest idea whether either this world or the next provided him with any theory. He was perfectly decorous, rather depressed in a gentlemanly sort of way; he dressed *beautifully;* he was in the Home Office from ten to

three unless he had some other engagement. And there is very little more to say about him.

Lady Brasted, after breakfast on Monday morning, took her rosary, her diary bound in orange morocco and a small pious book in French, printed on rice-paper, and went out to the cedar. Again, subconsciously, she found a seat upon which the sunflecks fell with peculiar grace, as in Mr. La Thangue's pictures, and sat down upon it. She could just see from there, she told herself, that line of blue hills, framed between the pillars of the terrace, that was so suggestive.

Then she began, gravely and simply, looking out in her far-away manner at the hills, to consider whether there was any one in the house whom she could Help.

Three minutes later, as if guided by an angel, Algy appeared on the top of the garden steps and, seeing no one, began to descend. She remained perfectly still till he came upon her; then she looked up at him sweetly. His face was badly bruised, she noticed.

"Aren't you going shooting, Mr. Algy?" she said.

Algy's heart sank — he had not seen her; and he had wished to run over his new ideas once more; they were not quite arranged yet.

"Not going till twelve," he said rather gruffly.

"Then will you take me round the gardens?" she said, "I long to see them all again."

There was nothing for it. She placed her diary, her pious book and her pearly rosary in a neat heap on her chair, stood up, lifting her parasol and, on second thoughts, languidly took up her rosary once more.

Oh! but it was dreary for Algy. He wanted nobody just now. He wanted to be let alone, and here was this woman, tactfully congratulating him on what he had done last night, making it perfectly clear that her thought was his and that she too understood that intention was the thing that mattered. She insinuated herself, by half-finished sentences and significant silences, even by sudden shadowy smiles, into that small and secret retreat that he had just succeeded in making for himself, and she brought with her her dangling rosary, her devout atmosphere, her genius for intimacy and her careful artlessness.

By the summer-house, above the fish fountain, she said:

"It is a wonderful thing to learn our own solitude — to learn that nobody, *nobody* can quite understand our own point of view. Dear Father Badminton was the first who taught me that; it is a very hard lesson."

As they walked on the grass beneath the avenue, she poured out, if I may say so, a vibrating silence of sympathy that thrilled him as with a subtle gas which he could not exclude. The worst of all was that it was undeniable that she did understand exactly what he was feeling. He tried to tell himself she did not, but it was useless. She nodded softly at his desperate half sentences; she said precisely the right thing; she knew all about him, as a scientist knows all about an impaled beetle; she even correlated a few of his unsorted thoughts and gave him one or two new ones, undeniably beautiful and true; she fitted things on to Christian doctrines, and, supremely, she indicated to him that she had not disclosed half her treasures, and that there lay behind all that she said a world of truth and confidence to which he had not as yet the *entrée.*

He was both indignant and intoxicated as he came back with her shortly before twelve — indignant at his own elementariness and banality, since it seemed that he was not in the least apart or original after all, and intoxicated, in spite of himself, by being understood so perfectly; and he did not yet recognize that his indignation was a sign that there were still parts of his soul to which she did not and never could penetrate.

She put her hand very gently for an instant on

his arm as they approached the steps back again on to the upper lawn.

"Thank you," she said with soft emphasis — no more than that. And once more fury surged within him at the thought that there was an understanding between them.

"Dear, uncouth boy," she said to herself (for she had a habit of formulating a situation), "and not one here understands him." And she determined to see something of him in London — perhaps she would be able to introduce him to Father Badminton some day. He certainly was different from the rest of his family. He seemed to her more pliable.

(II)

Mary came out half an hour later, and found Lady Brasted still sitting under the cedar. Mary was rather sore again this morning, for Theo seemed really hopeless. She had expressly stood in the outer hall, with a newspaper behind her back, to give him a chance of making way, and he had strode through twice, hardly looking at her, first without his gaiters and then with them.

Then she had gone to the billiard-room, leaving the door open, and knocked the balls rather noisily *about.* She knew that the guns were kept just out-

side. And all that he had done was to look in sharply and to demand whether that young fool Harold were anywhere about. No, he was not, she said rather tartly. Ten minutes later, through the open door of the billiard-room, down the short passage and through the window, she had seen the party climb into the motor and go off, with Sybil looking at them. Then she threw her cue on to the table and went out into the garden.

Lady Brasted lifted her eyebrows questionably, and smiled without parting her lips. It was a smile she subconsciously reserved for unemotional occasions.

"Yes, they're just gone," said Mary, and sat down.

These two knew one another pretty well; it was a case of Christian names and kissing; each, in public and in their correspondence, would have called the other her dearest friend; each, in private, attempted to assume a pedestal of slightly greater height than that on which the other stood. Annie Brasted knew that she had a reasonable, respectable and romantic religion and that Mary had not; Mary knew she had a purely intellectual interest greater than Annie's. Annie was married excellently, Mary wished to be; but Mary could stand with men on their own *ground and* be welcome there, and Annie

could not and did not wish to. Objectively considered, therefore, Lady Brasted could give points to Miss Maple; subjectively, Mary thought that she won them all back from Annie, and, at any rate, she was still her own mistress. Psychologically speaking, therefore, it was a complicated situation; neither was yet the victor and each wished to be.

Now, Lady Brasted this morning was flushed with confidence; she knew quite well that she had rung the bell, so to speak, in her conversation with Algy, and she was in a Helpful mood; so she closed forces without delay.

"You look tired, my dear."

"I am tired," said Mary abruptly. She, on the other hand, was disjointed and relaxed and did not understand that the first shot had been fired.

There was a long silence.

Lady Brasted began to review the situation, for she felt like a ministering angel this morning. This poor girl! she said to herself, feeling very old and experienced.

She had kept her eyes open since Saturday, and, as her intentions were really rather delicate, she had seen what was going forward. Here was Mary, twenty-nine years old, a year over her own age, still at a loose end; and she was pretty and charming and sensible. And here was Theo, a perfectly respect-

able eldest son; . . . and here was Algy also. . . . She had observed these three, especially at breakfast this morning, and two of them in the motor yesterday. . . . Surely, here was enough to venture upon.

"I have been for a nice walk with Mr. Algy," cooed Lady Brasted presently. "The poor boy! How well he behaved last night; and how difficult for him!"

"Difficult?" said Mary, knowing perfectly what she meant.

"So difficult to be at his ease! And he is not at all that kind."

"I don't understand."

"My dear, I am sure you do. He is just a straight-forward, unsubtle boy with . . . with a very tender soul; he was terribly distressed at being beaten by that young man. Now, Mr. Theo —"

"Theo wouldn't have been beaten," observed Mary.

"That is just it. There are no problems of that sort for Mr. Theo."

Mary knew this mood of Annie's and did not find it congenial just now. Suddenly she was startled by a white hand upon her knee.

"My dear," said the other. "You don't wish to talk?"

This was a direct challenge, and Mary was rather taken aback. She did not exactly know what it meant.

"I am only a little tired," she said uneasily.

Lady Brasted rose sweepingly, gathered her objects of piety, looked smilingly and intently into Mary's eyes, swooped delicately and kissed her. Then she was rustling towards the house, very slender and youthful, and Mary stared after her.

Mary was really startled as she sat alone in the speckled shadow. She had been taken completely by surprise and began to wonder violently what in the world Annie Brasted meant by this sudden sympathy. She knew Annie's Tact when she said it — in fact, it was difficult for any one not to see it; and it was a weapon which she did not know how to meet. She had seen it before, and it always meant something. Yet Annie could not have detected anything, because there was nothing to detect.

Psychological self-analysis was like a floating atmosphere of disease, it seems, during these days at Crowston; for in five minutes after Lady Brasted's departure, Mary, like Algy, was at it too.

She ran over her previous meditations first — concerning her need of this kind of life, the presentableness of Theo, his obvious good-fellowship with

her and her distinct liking of him, and, to her astonishment, perceived that this latter element must have made some progress even during the last two days. Her peevishness of this morning in the billiard-room had a personal touch in it of which she had not been previously aware. Her desire to see that square, brown figure, with its ruddy face and flat cap, come into the room had certainly not been wholly mercenary. . . . At dinner, too, last night, she remembered now certain faint emotions that could hardly be accounted for by sheer calculation of the rent-roll of Crowston.

Back and back her mind went, circling inwards. The motor on the previous day had had one of those spasms of bad temper that by idealistic materialists might almost be attributed to a possession of something resembling animal life; and she remembered watching with a curious intentness the goggle-eyed figure which, with hands on knees, peered doubtfully, behind the energetic Lord Brasted, into the maze of handles and coils which seemed responsible. He had said a word to the two ladies, and she, she remembered, had nodded, still looking, but without understanding.

Then there had been church. She was astonished to remember how much of her meditations had been centered on the solid worshiper at her side,

and, even more significant, her sense of irritation at Algy's black coat in front, of which the collar was not perfectly in place.

And so on. . . .

Mary got up presently, and began to walk softly up and down in the shadow. . . . And it was Annie's Tact that had called out all this energy of thought — not, perhaps, exactly maidenly, for Mary was not at all *ingénue*. It was that Tact that had driven her inwards, in a sudden doubt of self-questioning as to whether she understood herself.

She grew even more restless presently and wandered out on to the sunny terrace between the pedestals and up and down the grass path between the flower-beds and the railings that held out the urgent grasses of the meadow-land.

Was it possible, she asked herself, that she was really in love after all? She imagined Theo as dead, and felt no very lacerating agony. She imagined him married to somebody else — Sybil Markham, for instance — and immediately found herself disliking Sybil Markham with an extraordinary vehemence. That would be intolerable. . . . Why? . . .

(She began to finger the limp, evil-smelling leaves of a great scarlet poppy.) Why? Was it solely be*cause Sybil* had no business to be mistress of such

estates? Was it that only? No; it was not that only. Then what was it?

She began to visualize Theo once more — his face, his gaiters, his solid, pounding walk. Then she broke off and asked herself yet another question.

Supposing Algy was eldest son and Theo second, what then? Algy could be hers at the lifting of a finger, though several years her junior. The question was, Would that finger be lifted if Theo was about?

Here she stuck, tearing off the thin leaf and rolling it into a ball as she moved on. She did not know. She thought not. She was not quite sure. . . . Oh! yes she was, quite sure that nothing, not all wide Crowston, could induce her to marry Algy. That was certain; he was too clumsy and self-conscious. Besides, she did not care for him. Well, then, what about Theo? That did not settle Theo. Or rather did it not rather seem as if it did settle Theo?

She quickened her pace, a little flushed; and, to relieve the tension, began to be extremely vindictive towards Annie Brasted. What business had Annie to be so disagreeably tactful, and patronizing? Marriage was not everything, not even marriage to a fat nobleman who knew all about motors that must be known.

No; but marriage was a good deal. And once more Theo appeared before her.

She was distinctly cross at lunch. There was no other word for it; and Annie's discreet murmurings about this and that subject, not even remotely connected with any male creature under Crowston roof, made her even more annoyed.

The men were all out shooting. For some topographical reason it had been thought better not to join them at lunch, and somehow their absence gave an air of desolation to the dining-room. She heard a suggestion that she should go out again in the motor, which had returned, under the care of Lord Brasted's own chauffeur, and whom he trusted, said Mrs. Banister, as he trusted himself; but she hardly paid any attention to it, beyond announcing that she would sooner sit out in the garden. Sybil, it seemed, was of another opinion and observed that Harold had told her that they would begin on the Bovey acres after lunch and that if she was in the dip beyond the keeper's cottage at half-past two it might be possible to see a very pretty bit of sport. As there was no very startling demand to see this pretty bit of sport, Mrs. Banister volunteered to take Sybil herself, if dear Annie and dear Mary were quite sure they could amuse themselves.

It seemed that they could, and ten minutes later *Mary* was watching Annie from the morning-room

window once more drifting across to the cedar.

She waited five minutes more to avoid any appearance of haste; and then, with all her doubts resolved into one clear question, she too went out.

Annie saw her coming and discerned its significance. She had not spoken at random this morning, and she took her courage resolutely in both hands, reminding herself of her mission to Help others.

"I want you to tell me something," said Mary, sitting down without ado and looking straight at her friend. "Why did you think I was tired this morning?"

"My dear, I thought you looked so."

"Did you mean anything else?"

Lady Brasted hoisted, so to speak, sympathy into her eyes and a particular kind of smile on to her lips, putting out a hand gently towards the other's arm.

"Mary, dear, are you sure you mean to talk about it?"

Mary's head jerked a little.

"I want you to tell me what you meant."

"My dear, you must allow an old married woman a little insight. Need I say any more?"

Mary's face grew quite white.

"I think that's very impertinent," she said. "Yes, I *know I asked* you, but you had no business

to think such things. That kind of thing might do a lot of harm; besides, there isn't, as it happens, the very least truth —"

She stopped suddenly. But it was too late.

Lady Brasted was conscious of a nervous commotion within her, but she did not flinch from her thrust.

"No truth in what, Mary dear?"

"In — in — in what you thought."

"But I did not say a word, my darling."

For a moment or two there was a complete silence. For Mary, in her fury, it was impossible to reckon up the situation, nor to calculate precisely what her friend's words did or did not count for.

Then she stood up suddenly, seeing that explanation was impossible. Her lips shook violently; once or twice they opened to speak. Then, with a kind of quick wrench, she had turned towards the house again.

A minute later Lady Brasted was rustling after her.

It was all very feminine.

(III)

Theo was shooting quite extraordinarily badly this afternoon, but he was conscious of no other pressing problem except this. It was curious, he *told himself*, how a man's shooting went up and

down. On Saturday he had killed three rights and lefts and had not missed more than one single bird flying alone; to-day he had killed no rights and lefts at all and had further distinguished himself immediately after lunch by solemnly missing a lolloping rabbit clean with both barrels.

He had a headache, he told himself, and it must have been because he had been foolish enough, this hot September day, to drink beer instead of whisky at lunch. This was all the more stupid, he thought, because he distinctly remembered now feeling not quite well during the last three or four days. It must be his liver again. He resolved to drink whisky at dinner and no port.

When Sybil came out with her hostess in the motor, the chauffeur, for some perverse reason of his own, chose to halt at a point in the dip where Harold was just exactly hidden by a thornbush, and where Theo was fully visible over the hedge against the sky-line. Yet it seemed so obviously the place from which to have the best view of the pretty bit of sport that she did not dare to make any suggestion.

The dip where they had halted, drawn up by the side of the high road that crossed the Bovey acres, seemed to have been specially created by an indulgent Providence to afford a view of partridge shoot-

ing. On the right, it is true, there was not much to see, since the boundary hedge was hardly thirty yards away, and there needed but one gun, represented to-day by Theo, to slay all that came that way, either straight down the stubbles or swerving across the road. But on the left a low hedge gave a full view of a long, slowly rising sweep of ground, across which, at right angles to the road, ran an excellent hedge where the other guns were posted.

Harold alone was invisible, or rather all of him except his legs; but Lord Brasted, Algy, Mr. Banister, Jack Hamilton and a far-away stranger were full in view, dwindling with the distance.

It seemed that the motor was just in time. The road fifty yards ahead curved sharply away to the right, and straight in front the broad stubbles appeared in perspective, crossed by a broad strip of dark green, denoting the roots where the mass of the birds would surely be gathered, and beyond this strip, even now entering it as Sybil looked eagerly out under her hand, were tiny moving figures that bobbed and vanished like specks across feverish eyes.

It was a breathlessly silent afternoon, as clear and as Sundayish as yesterday, Sybil told herself. Slaughter seemed almost irreverent to-day, she thought, though she reassured herself by the memory of the excellent cold partridge at breakfast that *morning*. After all, men must do something, she

said, and women, as well as men, must eat; then why not partridges? Besides, Harold liked it so much.

How tiresome that that boy would stand behind that bush! She turned resolutely on the leather cushions and stared at Theo, and, as she did so, came a distinct and sudden crack from the stranger on the far left; and, as she turned once more, another and another, and then, as she thought them, two stupendous bangs from beyond the thorn-bush. A brown thing came in a tumbled heap suddenly over the hedge in front, thumped, slid and lay still. That was Harold's; and she smiled all over her face with pleasure.

A hand was laid silently on her arm.

"Look, my dear."

Across the roadside hedge fifty yards straight ahead sailed suddenly a group of flying specks. Another dropping volley rang out on the left, but it was not at these. On and on they came, crossing slightly and rising, to the accompaniment of the death shots of their friends, straight up and on still to the right, with an incredible swift steadiness; and, as Sybil stared, nearer even than Harold's bangings, came two reports from the crouching brown figure against the sky on her right. There was the sound of a long hush and silence; and she saw Theo jerking his gun open with a kind of savage impatience.

There were cries from in front, their high voices, as the beaters came to the middle of the roots, and again and again the bangings near and far from the line of guns on the left.

Then again a covey crossed to Theo, and again two bangs and silence; then, glorious in his pride, like a fantastic toy, straight out of the hedge ten yards away rose, with loud crying, a bird looking positively gigantic, so near it was and so unexpected.

Sybil knew well enough that this was a pheasant and that his time was not yet; all that she perceived in a moment; and the next, to her astonishment, came a couple of shots close at hand, and the great bird fell leaving a cloud of feathers behind him, smashed on to the road, hustled a yard or two, and lay still. Why, what in the world was Mr. Theo doing?

But there was no time to ask. She heard an exclamation, and then a cheerful voice from Harold.

"My dear chap—"

And then again came the bang on the left, and Sybil saw a living speck float over Harold's head in an exquisite parabola and fall.

Then up the road, mad with fright, came a hare, appearing suddenly from nowhere, as their manner is. She cried out something, then bit her lip in self-repression and glanced up. That brown figure on the right was hurrying to the hedge with a gun

up, and as the hare, after passing the motor, emerged again from it and sped up the road, even now scarcely fifteen yards away from Theo, she saw the gun go up to the shoulder.

There followed a deafening bang; a cloud of white dust sprang up behind the hare, another bang, another cloud; and beyond it, running like a streak, appeared the hare, dwindling every instant.

"Damn!"

She heard it, and again bit her lip.

When she turned again, the brown figure was gone.

About three minutes later a beater emerged into the road, then another and another.

Then Harold appeared, walking with a swing, climbed down the hedge and came up to the motor.

"I say, that was ripping," he said. "Didn't I tell you just right?"

"What did you get?"

"Three brace and a hare and two rabbits," remarked Harold in an aloof manner; "and they got more up the other end. I say, where's Theo?"

Sybil indicated with her head. She was leaning over the side.

"I say," she whispered, "I thought pheasants weren't —"

"I know; won't we rag him. I say, mother, did you see that?"

"I thought it a very nice shot," observed Mrs. Banister.

"Oh! an excellent shot; not more than five yards off the end of his gun, and exactly three weeks too soon. . . . *Theo.*"

Before there was any answer, Algy and his father appeared above the hedge. Harold turned to them genially.

"I say, Theo's shot a pheasant."

It seemed to Sybil as if Mr. Banister was looking across the road rather intently at something. He paid no attention whatever to his younger son. Then he suddenly called —

"Theo, my son, what's the matter?"

It was very odd that there was no answer; nor was the brown figure visible. Mr. Banister scrambled straight down the bank, handing first his gun to Algy, and then, without waiting to take it again and without even looking at the motor, crossed the road, an imposing figure in gray jacket and knickerbockers, and clambered up the opposite bank.

Sybil did not quite know what was happening. There seemed a curious hush. Harold still stood, looking blankly after his father who was through the hedge by now, and a moment later Lord Brasted, Jack Hamilton and Mr. Mortimer, the curate, the *latter in a sombre* gray, very neat and ecclesiastical,

with a minute gold cross hanging from a button-hole, appeared above the left-hand bank and stood, also looking across to the other side. Mrs. Banister seemed to notice nothing, and a group of beaters was engaged in laying out the game.

"What's up?"

It was Algy's voice; and it seemed even more tactless than usual. Then Harold put down his gun suddenly on the grass by the side of the road and was up the bank too.

"Where's your father?" observed Mrs. Banister generally to the company.

Then there was an odd sound from over the hedge; and the next instant Harold's voice saying something in a quick undertone. But before the shooters on the left-hand bank were halfway down, a little group of three appeared on the right, clear against the sky, where five minutes before Theo had stood — the tall, old man on one side with Harold on the other, and the third in the middle, with a curiously twitching face.

"Just come and help," said Mr. Banister, sharply. "Here, good men! Mr. Theo's not well."

CHAPTER IV

ILLNESSES are both dreary and complicated considered as a subject for description, and no doubt I should make many mistakes if I attempted to describe exactly what Theo Banister went through. But, very briefly, he suffered from appendicitis. On the Wednesday morning an operation was performed, and on Thursday morning Mr. Mortimer was sent for, in the Vicar's absence in Lermatt.

It was a very curious household regarded in the solemn light of the shadow of death. The Brasteds, with Jack Hamilton, fled at once, on the Monday evening. Fortunately they were independent of the train service and arrived at Esher in time for dinner, bringing with them Sybil, who was to be despatched to her home next morning. But Mary staid on. Mrs. Banister seemed to desire a female friend, though she did not say so, and Mary, on an impulse, went to Algy and asked him to ask his father whether she could be of any use. So she *staid.*

No one seemed to know how to behave, and all, therefore, took refuge in solemnity. After a long silence at lunch on Wednesday, Harold choked suddenly and left the room abruptly, and in sympathy with him, Algy had to bite very hard on his lower lip, which was still sore from his encounter on Sunday. It had been announced to them an hour before that the operation had not been as successful as had been hoped. The Crowston doctor, a perfectly competent man, was to come again this evening and again on the following morning. The specialist had returned to London.

The worst of all was that amusement of any sort seemed indecent. Shooting was out of the question; even a round of golf on the park links would have been a trifle profane. Mr. Banister struck the key in which the house was to live by appearing each day in trousers instead of knickerbockers.

Harold was horribly unhappy during the rest of Wednesday and showed it by an extreme degree of crossness.

He wandered into the billiard-room about half an hour before the dressing-bell and found Algy knocking the balls about. He sat down by the fire, took up a "Punch" and stared in dead silence at a cartoon by Mr. Sambourne for about five minutes. And all the while he was framing a remark.

It came out at last. He banged the " Punch " and stood up, glowering.

" I think you might have the decency not to play billiards," he said.

Algy, who at that moment was addressing himself to a stroke, made it with extreme though trembling deliberation, watched the unsuccessful run of the balls with elaborate interest and then straightened himself.

" It's as good as ' Punch ' I think," he said.

Harold half lowered his eyelids in a way he had in annoyance.

" Oh! well, if you think so," he said, " when — when Theo's dying."

His pathos was too much for him, and, as at lunch, he went out hastily.

Algy made a couple more strokes, put his cue down, went to the fire and leaned his head against the high mantelpiece. In both of them the sense of humor was just now overlaid.

He, too, was extremely unhappy. He was going through emotions which he could not fully understand; but one thing he did see, and that was that to behave in as normal a manner as possible was the best thing to do.

The element that particularly bewildered him was the same juxtaposition of Theo and death. It was *as if a retriever* developed a taste for Beethoven.

There seemed absolutely nothing in common between them, and there was not the tragedy of a brilliant contrast. The two were unmixable, impossible on the same plane.

Death, to Algy's mind, roughly connected the unknown, the mysterious, the delicate, the mystical, the spiritual, and Theo stood for shooting-gaiters, cigars and the pedigree of dogs. You do not put the "Imitation of Christ" on the same shelf as the "Sporting Guide," though there is nothing whatever intrinsically sinful about the "Sporting Guide" and nothing intrinsically holy about the "Imitation." Only, you do not put them on the same shelf. Yet upstairs that was the situation. Theo was next door to death.

The passage of time, too, seemed such a relative thing just now. It was last Sunday only that he had been battered by a young man in a lane, yet, for all personal connection with the fact, it might have happened in his childhood. He no longer felt any sense of shame at it. That and shooting and the Bradsteds and even Mary, as he had thought of her last week, were simply in another volume.

In so strange a mood was Algy that grief, properly so-called, had not yet begun — scarcely even anxiety as it is commonly understood. If Theo, at this moment, had marched in in dress-clothes and

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said that he had got all right after all and wanted a knock at the balls before dinner, certainly a huge burden would have been lifted from Algy's heart, but it would not have been exactly joy. Rather it would have been a sense of relief that things were normal again, instead of abnormal.

But Theo was not there in dress-clothes. He was upstairs in his room, with two baize doors kept closed in the passage that led to it. He was in bed, with bandages and a drawn face, and two nurses sat by him, and a monstrous shadow darkened over him hour by hour.

Since, then, things were so abnormal, within and without, Algy saw that to do normal things steadily was the only reasonable plan. He deplored Harold's artificiality, and it was exactly that which gave him his undoubted sense of a superior position over the extreme unnaturalness of the other. He, at any rate, had some kind of an anchor down. Harold had none.

Dinner was terrible that evening. His mother and Mary were dining upstairs, and his father and Harold were scarcely relieving to the situation. Mr. Banister, following out some profound instinct, wore a swallow-tail coat instead of a dinner jacket and sat with an air of fateful gloom that would have brought inevitable disaster upon an hysterically inclined observer. Harold ate rapidly and slightly

and drank a good deal, and both of them were practically dumb.

Mr. Banister vanished again upstairs after dinner and did not reappear.

Harold also vanished, but came to the smoking-room, where Algy betook himself, some half hour later.

It seemed as if Harold had undergone a change of some kind since his flash of bitterness in the billiard-room; for he seemed comparatively softened. He sat down in silence for a minute or two, staring at the fire, yet without any sign of resentment, and at last he spoke.

"Algy, old chap — I'm — I'm sorry I said that before dinner."

"Oh, that's all right," mumbled Algy, laying aside "Punch" and covered in a moment with extreme and overpowering confusion.

Harold swallowed once in his throat.

"I was beastly to you. I often am. I'm beastly sorry."

"That's all right," mumbled Algy again. "I'm just as bad."

But Harold seemed determined on a detailed penitence. He thrust out his boyish face bravely to the fire.

"Twice on Sunday, too: once in the wood, and in the house *in the* evening. I'm sorry."

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Algy braced up his forces.

"Look here, Harold; shut up. I'm as bad as you. . . . There. Now let's talk about something else."

They did talk of something else then, but it was not very successful. They discussed, Harold with vindictive insistence, the identity of the young man who had battered Algy. They made, too, when their voices got steadier, cheerful remarks about "old Theo" and about arrangements for another shoot as soon as he was better. It was desperate work, but they did it, and Harold grew positively animated, though with a touch of feverishness.

It was not until after ten minutes or so that Algy began to see the reason of his change of front, and he saw it, I suppose, through interpreting his own modified attitude. It was that Harold had a vague idea of being propitiatory to the Unseen Powers. These must be satisfied and soothed, since Theo was in Their hands: it would not do to be resentful and suspicious. He wondered whether Harold had gone upstairs after dinner to say his prayers; it seemed probable, yet to Algy, oddly enough, it did not occur that to say his prayers was exactly what was needed. Rather there was a sort of general attitude to the Supernatural that seemed more suitable. *He* was perfectly aware that fervent adjura-

tions, poured out even in dress-clothes in a fire-lit bedroom after dinner, need not always attain their explicit object. In fact, very often they did not, and even more pathetic petitions than those, if such were possible. Yet that there was an attitude required he perfectly understood — an attitude which he could not have defined and yet which consisted rather in an identification of himself with Them, his will with Theirs, rather than in an attempt to wrench Theirs to his. This, he even perceived, was more likely to be successful in obtaining Theo's recovery than any amount of what was probably Harold's method. Intellectually he could not have defended the position; practically he was certain of it as sound.

The two brothers went up to bed a little later, on tip-toe, after an elaborate and courteous lighting of one another's candles. Men do not, like women, exchange long glances on such occasions: they mutually perform small offices instead.

At the top of the stairs they paused; then peeped together, without a word, round the angle, up the corridor that led to Theo's room. But there was no sign either of life or death. The baize door kept all secrets. They stared at it, fascinated, visualizing what lay beyond — the darkened room, the nurses, Theo, and *the shadow* of death.

A door on the right suddenly opened without a sound, and, without seeing them, their father came out in his quilted dressing-gown and turned through the baize door. But Algy caught a clear glimpse of that ruddy, troubled face, thrown into vivid light and shadow by the candle he carried, the white eyebrows, the pursed mouth, and once more the strangeness and abnormality of it all swept him away.

If Theo was an incongruous subject for death, his father was no less an incongruous supporter in the conflict. What did even he, asked Algy of himself, really know about it all, and what could he say?

Mr. Mortimer was engaged on the Thursday morning in studying the "Guardian," which to him represented all that was brightest and best in Christianity. It reached him always by the first post, and after propping it against his tea-pot during breakfast, he retired with it to his arm-chair till the bell rang across the village street for matins.

The Vicar was in Switzerland, and Mr. Mortimer read matins (the shortened form) to the schoolmaster's wife's sister and once more retired home to the "Guardian," a briar pipe and his chair. On other days than Thursdays he studied theology until eleven, theology of the Cathedral Dean type, *but, as he remarked*, a man must be in touch with ac-

tual life as well as with books, if he is to be efficient, so he devoted Thursday morning to the "Guardian" newspaper.

He noticed with interest that the Bishop of Zebu was in England again as usual. That prelate, it seemed, thought that he could do more real good by pleading for his poor flock in England than by actually ministering to them; so he was accustomed to come home for the summer with his wife not more frequently than once in two years.

(He always said on such occasions, with an exile smile, that his heart really lay in Zebu.)

There was a meeting of the English Church Union, too, Mr. Mortimer observed with disapproval, that had roused extreme enthusiasm in Manchester — with disapproval, for, as he said, he had no sympathy with extremists. It was the glory of the Church of England to preserve a mean in all things, and Mr. Mortimer lent his aid to that delicate task. In a word, he disapproved; that perhaps may indicate his attitude; or, if more particularity is required, he was vague without being wide, he was dogmatic on everything except dogma. He was earnest. And he was perfectly sincere.

He was deeply interested this morning in an editorial on the subject "How to Touch the Men," for this was Mr. Mortimer's special subject. Not that he was very successful, although his Bible-class on

Sunday afternoons, enlivened occasionally by a cornet solo, was far from being a failure; but he had, like a certain hero of fiction, at least formed some ideas on the subject. His great point, which he urged at clerical meetings, was that if the men were to be touched at all, they must be met on their own platform, on their own level. The clergyman must not hold himself aloof. Was it not notorious that France was what she was simply because the priests were of the seminary and the sacristy? The clergyman, then, must shoot with his wealthier parishioners and play football with his poorer. He must be a man of clubs and gymnasiums and coursing classes. He must not refuse even to dance upon occasion.

The "Guardian," it seemed, was of Mr. Mortimer's mind, and urged a more whole-hearted advance into the social life of the people. It quoted with qualified approval a parish on the great North Road where a motor garage was in process of erection in the vicar's fowl-run — a step forward which at any rate was in the right direction, though probably of too enthusiastic a nature. Cyclists' services, however, at half-past three on Sunday afternoon, with short addresses on subjects, as "Many shall run to and fro," and facilities for tea to follow, met with that journal's cordial praise.

This was all very desperate and encouraging to *Mr. Mortimer*, and he began to read the article for

the second time; but he had hardly begun when his gate slammed and footsteps came quickly up the flagged path. He was too deep in his subject to be curious, and from where he sat he could not see who was ringing so loud at his front-door, but a minute later he heard the steps go rapidly down again, and then his door opened.

"Please, sir, Mr. Theo's much worse and would like to take communion. Would you kindly step up?"

There followed consternation and excursions. Drawers were pulled out; steps ran to and fro; Jane flew across to the Church to unlock the vestry, and in about a quarter of an hour Mr. Mortimer, with a black bag, and Dr. Walsham How's work on pastoral theology in his pocket, was proceeding up the park at a rapid pace.

It was his first wealthy death-bed, if such a phrase may be used, and he was nervous. He could not say quite the same things as to the farm laborers, or, at least not in the same language, and further, he stood in a certain inexplicable awe of Mr. Theo.

It is true that he had shot with him several times since his coming to the parish, but he had not yet made sufficient way to be able to raise Theo's thoughts through partridge-shooting to higher things. At dinner, too, it had proved equally diffi-

cult. It might be that this man was on his way to be Touched, but the contact had not yet been established.

Mr. Mortimer was completely sincere; let that be understood. He was not at all superficial in his intentions; he was anxious, sincerely and humbly, to do what he could to help Theo to die, but he had not an idea as to how to set about it. It was for this reason that he had taken down Dr. Walsham How from his shelf. If all else failed he might read a little aloud perhaps.

The great white house, solemn and serene looking, rose presently over the edge of the garden, but Mr. Mortimer was still agitated. He wondered how he ought to begin. "My dear brother" must be his phrase; but what next? . . . "Er . . . my dear brother," repeated Mr. Mortimer to himself.

He had better begin with the Communion Service. It was very encouraging that that had been mentioned. At least that showed that the dying man was in earnest. After that he might perhaps ask for a little private talk. Well; he must see.

A footman was waiting for him at the garden steps that led into the house.

"How is he?" gasped the clergyman out of *breath.*

"The doctor thinks he is sinking, sir. Will you step this way?"

The man threw open the door into the morning-room, and Mr. Mortimer went in.

Mr. Banister was there, in a black tail-coat, with the doctor, a harmless but competent little man with the hair on his face resembling the cut of a horse's curb that had slipped over his mouth.

That red old face was very grave and twitching as the clergyman held out his hand with a murmur of earnest sympathy.

"Thank you, Mr. Mortimer. . . . Yes. . . . Yes, the doctor thinks he had better receive communion at once. . . . He wishes to. . . . His mother asked him."

Then the brave old face twitched again, and resolved itself into such a solemnity that even Mr. Mortimer felt a hysterical lump rise suddenly in his throat.

"It . . . is very unexpected," stammered the clergyman. "I was meaning to call and inquire this afternoon. . . . Er. . . . Shall I vest here and go up immediately?"

He was extraordinarily moved by the sight of the old man, who seemed as dazed and broken as a child in the face of sudden and violent cruelty. Dr. Walsham How seemed an unnecessary burden after all. Surely his heart was full enough now.

He tore off his coat, disclosing gray flannel shirt sleeves with white detachable cuffs, and opened his bag, listening, as he took out his garments, to the low talking of the other two, and meanwhile he framed sentences that sprang to his brain.

Then his cassock was on, and he buttoned it hastily; then his stiff surplice, his Oxford hood and his black scarf; and he began to take out the communion vessels.

He turned,

"A — a little port wine, Mr. Banister, and . . . and a little plain bread. . . . Might I trouble you?"

The old man rang the bell from where he stood on the hearth-rug, and nodded towards the clergyman as the man appeared. Mr. Mortimer repeated his request.

It was a few minutes later that all was ready, and the footman still stood by the door.

"Might I ask the man to bring these other things upstairs, Mr. Banister?"

Then a little procession was formed.

The footman led the way carrying a decanter and a book, on which was placed a plate of bread cut into squares. Mr. Mortimer followed with the communion vessels under a white cloth, and Mr. Banister came last. In the passage leading to Theo's *room, Mr.* Mortimer halted, half turning round.

"How many will receive?" he whispered.

The old man's head jerked, but he could not speak.

A nurse opened the first baize door as they approached it, latched it back and passed on to the second.

Mr. Mortimer's heart was beating miserably hard. He was still a very young man, he knew no more really about Death than he did about Touching Men, and here was the double problem awaiting to test the ideas he had formed on both these subjects. He already was regretting having left Dr. Walsham How downstairs.

Then the bedroom door was before him; it opened, and he passed into the darkened room, straight up to the little rosewood table at the foot of the bed, seeing over it a still figure lying among the sheets and on either side faces watching.

It was when Mr. Mortimer entered the room in his surplice and hood that the horrible and poignant pathos of the whole thing suddenly and for the first time pierced Algy clean through.

He had been completely dazed by the report of the doctor that morning that Theo was sinking rapidly. It seemed impossible; it was so uncharacteristic of Theo to sink. He had remained in the billiard-room by the window where he heard the news, looking out at the great cedar in the mellow September

air, holding his still unlighted cigarette, laboring to assimilate the fact.

Then his father had sent for him. Theo wished to receive communion. His mother was going to be there and wished both her sons to be present and receive with them. It would be in half an hour's time. Mr. Mortimer had been sent for.

Algy had run to his room and emerged again twenty minutes later, seeing Harold go before him with a little book in his hand.

Then the minutes of waiting in the half lit sick-room, for the mysterious parting Feast, with his finger in a little tin-edged Prayer Book, had been on the crust of sorrow and unreality like the sun on snow. . . . Theo. . . . Theo. . . . It was Theo who lay there, between him and the window, silent and motionless, his ruddy face hardly changed from when Algy had seen him last, with an august dignity as impersonal as a canopy over a child-king, entirely strange and unfamiliar, shadowing him. His mother and Mary knelt side by side beyond the bed, and Harold was on this side. The nurses had cleared the little rose-wood table with spindle-legs and an inlaid chess-board in the middle, and set it at the foot of the bed. Then there had followed a long silence.

Still he had hoped against hope that the mysterious rite that was to be done would somehow resolve

the suspension of the chord and bring into one plane Theo and death; for they still stood as apart as ever. Something was needed, something personal to unite with Theo, something infinite to complete the bridge on the side of death. A saint could do it, or a vision, or a voice — even perhaps some august mechanical ceremony that was its own evidence. . . .

And then Mr. Mortimer came in, and in a moment the hope died. He was inadequate, Algy knew in an instant, inadequate beyond description, inadequate in training, character, and commission. Here he stood at the little table, moved and shaking, in his stiff surplice and academic hood, as he had stood, though then at his ease, in the pulpit last Sunday, preaching on true manliness; the thing had been as unreal as a child's repetition. It was as virile as Mr. Mortimer himself on the Monday morning, in his dark gray Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, no more and no less.

The theology he was commissioned to preach — what was that, but ideas formed on the subject? Was it possible to picture Theo, an hour or two hence, with a crown on his head, in a white robe, with a palm? . . . But it was a metaphor! Then what did it illustrate? And, whatever it illustrated, what name would Theo make of it all? Was Death so great a magician as that — as to make

Theo capable of any form of spiritual existence comparable in the least to a white robe and a palm? . . .

"*My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord,*" rose the trembling voice. . . . "*Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.* . . . "

And this was Theo, with his flat cap and red mask of a face and his giggling laughter at certain kinds of stories. . . . The "chastening of the Lord" . . . "the Lord loveth" . . . And here he lay waiting, as simple as a child and as ignorant, willing to receive Communion since it was the proper action dictated to him by the only spiritual authority of which he was aware, and suggested by his mother.

Yet Algy had no alternative to offer. Only it seemed to him as if somewhere there were wide spaces and movements larger than those little movements of the clergyman, and a sound more expansive than his little voice. But Christ Himself had said so—"*Do this in remembrance of Me.* . . ." Somewhere, therefore, there was a link between this and that, an open door between the medically-something darkened room and the vast, inexorable world towards which Theo's face was set. . . . And where was that? Algy was dumb.

"*Ye that do truly and earnestly repent.* . . ."

Now what, in God's name again, did Theo know

about that? Was there one man who had ever said one word to him on the subject? Repentance — that was a change of heart, a regret, an intention to do better. Was Theo then changed, or had any man ever told him how to be? If this instant he recovered, what would be his comment a week hence?

"By George, you chaps"— the sentence formed itself complete before Algy's twisting brain —"By George, you chaps, I had a narrow squeak. Parson came, and all that you know."

Ah! it was intolerable —"By George, you chaps —"

"Hear what comfortable words our Saviour Christ saith. . . . Come unto Me, all that travail and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

For a moment Algy's bitterness melted, and his eyes filled with scalding tears. *"Come unto Me."*

And a great vision of a Divine Man with outstretched hands shone before his imagination — One who cared for sparrows and even for heavy, complacent men who had never known themselves or Him — yet they must be heavy laden before they could rest — they must have "travailed" in their heaviness — and what did Theo know of this? And again Algy crushed down his bitterness; for surely He must be great enough even for that!

There was dead silence in the room as Mr. Mortimer began the Prayer of Consecration. There was not more than one there who believed that it signified more than a commemoration of an event done two thousand years ago, a memory of a Supper, and an aid to faith. It was what One had done to whom they looked with an uncertain hope and that He had bidden them do as an indirect aid to something vague making for righteousness. Algy alone was not quite sure that it was only this.

The clergyman broke the crumbling bread and laid his hands upon the cup; then presently he knelt down. Theo's head turned gently on the pillow, and he gave a sigh of pain or weariness.

Algy closed his eyes again and began to pray, hopelessly, confusedly, desiring to be simple; but he could not be. Again his mind tortured him, and images fled before him, little vignettes of Theo with his gun, Theo in dress-clothes, Mr. Mortimer in his Norfolk suit and the little gold cross at his buttonhole. Even the sigh troubled him. Was Theo then just longing for the ceremony to be over? He had "wished to receive Communion," but had that wish been strong enough to persevere through ten minutes of religious service? God knew. Algy did not.

Then for himself. Was he, too, fit to receive the

mysterious Food? He had sparred ever so slightly with Harold at breakfast before the doctor had come. He had lit his cigarette as he came through the hall, though his father had often told him not. Then there were other things — his furious pride on Sunday night, his imaginations. . . .

Well, well, "Come unto Me . . . all that travail." Hear what comfortable words! All that are heavy laden. Then would Theo's stoic bearing of pain count as travail?

The clergyman, still kneeling, stretched out his hand and took in his fingers a morsel of bread, swallowed it, and paused. Then he took the cup, repeating in a loud whisper —

"The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was shed for me preserve my body and soul unto everlasting life. I drink this in remembrance that Christ's Blood was shed for me, and am thankful."

Mr. Banister received Communion first, where he knelt by his wife, taking in his shaking fingers the morsel of bread held out to him, then his wife and Mary. Then Mr. Mortimer passed round, brushing his silk scarf against the bed-post as he passed. Harold was the next, and then Algy.

Algy received it in the palm of his hand, as he had learnt in a church in Cambridge, lifted it to his

lips, closed his eyes and swallowed it. . . . Then he heard a rustling as Theo lifted his hand from beneath the bedclothes.

Then the cup was carried round. . . .

. . . . . .

As Algy passed out behind his mother and Mary five minutes later, he noticed, lying on the little silver plate, fragments of the holy food. Mr. Mortimer, still in his cassock and surplice, was staying behind with Mr. Banister, to see, presumably, whether Theo was strong enough to bear a little reading. But before Algy, still loitering in the gallery above the hall, had reached the passage leading to his room, a figure in surplice, scarf and Oxford hood came out and began to descend the stairs carrying the silver vessels.

Theo died in his sleep that evening. Mary was there, helping the nurses, but no one else. They only found he was dead when one of the nurses happened to touch him.

Algy, sitting alone with his mother in her morning-room an hour later, listened to her saying, over and over again, what a good boy Theo had always been, how pleased she was that he had received Communion and how they must all think that he was watching over them now.

"But my dear," she said tearfully, touching Algy's face, "your cheek is all bruised still. I am sure you ought to have used arnica."

PART II

CHAPTER I

(1)

THE October term had begun as usual, and the streets were full of shy freshmen, superior second-year men and all the rest. I made a few new acquaintances and missed some old ones, and the term moved on peaceably. It was not until a fortnight of the end of it that I saw anything of Algy Banister. To tell the truth, I had completely forgotten him since our meeting near King's Cross about three months before. I knew nothing of Theo's death. But a few days after December had begun, at about half-past nine in the evening, just as I was beginning matins and lauds for next day, the door was opened, and "Mr. Banister" was announced by an invisible maid beyond the screen. Then Algy appeared round it.

Certainly I knew his face as soon as I saw it, but I had to fence a few minutes with particular delicacy *before I knew* anything more. He sat forward

in my green arm-chair and nervously smoked a cigarette, and I made general conversation as well as I could. I was not even sure whether he were a Catholic or not. He mentioned that I had asked him to come and see me, but that was not distinctive enough. Finally, he asked me whether I had got down to Brighton all right. Then I knew, and, I am afraid, hyprocritically, suppressed all outward signs of relief.

Before he went away that evening, I learned that his eldest brother had died and that he himself was going to give up the Bar and settle down at home as soon as he had taken his degree, to help his father and learn the management of an estate.

I thought about him for about three minutes after he had gone and then settled down again to matins and lauds.

Christmas passed; and the Lent term began; and within a week of its beginning Algy turned up again.

When a young man turns up at the beginning of a term, I am fairly confident that he wishes to pursue my acquaintance. Otherwise he would put it off till the last possible day and then come and say good-bye. I could see, too, by Algy's bearing that he had something else to say. I didn't know whether it might not be about the Catholic Church, so I gave him no help, for I hold that the first word on a sub-

ject should, nearly always, come from the layman.

Finally he got it out — rather clumsily, but bravely enough.

"I want to talk to you, if I may," he said, straining at his cigarette. "I feel rather a fool and all that, but I don't know whom else to talk to."

"Please say exactly what you like," I said.

"It is about all sorts of things. I don't know where to begin."

"Why not at the beginning?"

He smiled rather feebly at that.

"Well — do you know, I think I will."

Then he began at the beginning.

(Nobody need be in the least alarmed. Before I began a word of this book Algy gave me full leave to write it. He has inspected the proofs up to the point where he leaves its pages. He has given me his *imprimatur,* only desiring that a few details by which persons and places might conceivably be identified should be altered. This has been done.)

When he had finished, helped now and then by questions, I sat quite silent for a full minute. I was really very much astonished at his self-knowledge. He told me everything — about his education, his tastes, his people, his difficulties. It was not at all a confession in the technical sense; he did not even tell it me because I was a priest; he simply told it me *because he knew* no one else to tell. He told me

in considerable detail all that has been related in the first part of this book and certain other things that have not. The people whom he described became very vivid to me. (I have even ventured, in consequence, to conjecture their meditations.)

It seemed that there were two or three points in particular on which he desired remarks. The first concerned Miss Mary Maple. (He had grown quite frank by now.)

"You know, I was awfully in love with her last year. It was just everything; and she, I think, was fond of my brother. Perhaps it's beastly of me to say that, but I may as well tell you what I think. Well; she was with us last Christmas, and, do you know, she was quite different. She never snubbed me once. She was much quieter, too. She sat with my mother much more, instead of coming to the billiard-room as she used. Now what do you make of that?"

I made a good deal of it to myself; but I didn't say much. I said I didn't know.

"Well, now, it's an extraordinary thing," said Algy, "but I feel quite different to her. You know, I can't help thinking — no; it's beastly of me even to think that."

"Yes; just so, and you can't tell, you know," I said, beginning to feel very sorry for Miss Mary Maple.

"And yet, you know," said Algy, "I made up to her last year as hard as I could, and I feel an awful brute now. Perhaps, she'll think it's because I've become eldest son and all that, and, you know, it isn't that — it isn't that."

He leaned forward in his intentness.

"My dear man, of course it isn't that. I know that."

"Well, but am I bound to her at all?"

I almost rose in the air with emphasis.

"You are not," I said; "you are not in the slightest way bound; not in the very faintest degree."

He looked puzzled at my vehemence.

"Why did you say it like that?"

"Because I am absolutely certain of it. . . . Please go on."

He leaned back.

"Well, that's the first thing. But there's this that comes in, too. . . . Now here I feel more of a fool than ever. I know it's a rottenly stupid thing to say — but — but marriage seems to me now — well — quite impossible."

"I don't think that's necessarily stupid," I said. "Sometimes — well, go on."

"I don't mean in itself," said Algy, staring at the red end of his cigarette, "but — but for me. It *seems so* — so futile, don't you know. . . . And

the odd thing is that now's exactly the time when I ought to be thinking about it. My people want it, and — well, it's obvious, isn't it?"

"Tell me when you first thought of it that way."

"Oh — well — when I was a boy, you know, I couldn't imagine what it was all about. Then came this thing with Miss Maple. But I don't know that even then it was quite what other people mean by marriage. I can't explain — but there is a difference, you know. . . . And then came my brother's death."

"Well?"

Algy tossed his cigarette into the fire, and leaned right back out of the lamplight. I carefully refrained from looking anywhere in his direction; because I saw that the Point was coming.

"Well — it's like this — I can't put it into words, you know — and, anyhow, it sounds fearfully arrogant and ridiculous. But it's like this. . . ."

He paused again. I said nothing.

"Well — ever since that time it has seemed to me that the whole world's perfectly mad. Here we are, fooling along — I told you what kind of things I've always done at home — fooling along, and making a lot of fuss about nothing at all — jawing and going out in motors and shooting. Look what a lot of time we spend in just keeping going — meals and sleeping, and so on. . . . Even clergymen —

well, I told you about Mr. Mortimer. He's an excellent chap — I don't mean he's not; he's a lot better than most. And yet — and yet — the whole time —"

Words failed him; but I saw what he was after.

"You mean the next world and death and so on," I said softly.

"Yes."

I was silent a minute or two. Of course it was, as he had said, all very arrogant; but he had said it was — and that meant a good deal.

"Tell me how you'd arrange your life, if you had it all your own way."

Algy considered.

"Well," he said, "I know it's unnatural, but it seems to me that I should like to live almost entirely alone. You see I'm not really at my ease with people. Being with them takes up such a lot of attention. I know that for some people it's not like that; they marry and have families and all that, just because they're that sort. I'm not saying anything against them. But it's not the same with me. Then — well, I know this sounds a silly thing to say — then, really and truly I want to be alone a great deal. It seems to me it's just the only thing that matters."

"How would the world go on," I interposed, "if *everybody did* that?"

I saw him smile in the half-light.

"Well, you know, everybody won't. Isn't that good enough?"

"Quite good enough — I only wanted to see — well, go on."

He moved uneasily in his chair.

"You know this isn't just a fancy with me. . . . I've had it, in a way, for ages. I go out in the woods a lot alone at home. Up here, too, about three days a week, I take the train — please don't think me an ass — out to Royston or somewhere, after lunch, just simply in order to be alone. (It was like that when we met in London, do you remember?) I walk back, or bicycle, and then the queer thing is that I can hardly bear to go into hall or to speak. I'm not shy; I've never been ragged; it isn't that I'm afraid of people. You see, I'm third year, and I've always got on all right. But it's just that I'm so absolutely crammed with something — I don't know what — that I want to be absolutely alone, so as to — to sort it — no, not quite that. Oh! you know what I mean."

I nodded very softly.

"Yes — but can't you tell me a little more?"

He drew himself up in his chair.

"Well, yes; I will," he said shortly. "It's this. . . . It's God."

A silence indeed fell then. He had told his secret; and I had not a word to say.

Outside the winter night was very still, for few were abroad. A tram a hundred yards away boomed up from St. Andrew's Street, grew yet more resonant, punctuated by the horse's hoofs, and died away again up the Hills Road. The clock chimed out its little plain song melody, telling the world that it was half-past ten as we count time. Over us were the stars and the infinite spaces. And all westwards of us lay the town, shuttered and lighted and warmed, where young men played cards and sang songs; and the colleges, old foundations formed in the Ages of Faith, where dons talked in studious rooms, and debating societies discussed ghosts and politics and passed resolutions and abolished the Established Church and Eight Hours' Bills and criticized the Universe. And here in my rooms sat a young man, telling me that he wanted to be alone with God.

"My dear boy," I said, "forgive me for saying what I'm going to say; but don't you think perhaps you are a little morbid? You know lots of men go through an odd time up here. Generally, I confess, it's the other way. They find that they don't want religion, and can get on perfectly well without it; but not all. And then, in ten years or so, whichever

way it has been with them, they just settle down as before and go on quietly —"

He burst in. His shyness was clean gone now. His face was alive with emotion.

"But that's exactly what I'm frightened of. It'd be too ghastly if I went back. . . . Father Benson, don't you understand? I thought you'd be sure to. You're a priest, and all that. Don't you see that I've found out something now. Good Lord! why are people such fools? You say that lots of people go through a queer time — well — well — and in God's name, can we tell that that isn't their one great chance? . . . that they see things as they really are. Why isn't twenty-two old enough? And nobody lives much over eighty. . . ."

I interrupted him this time.

"Look here; please don't get excited. Don't think I'm against you; I'm not. But you must tell me some more."

We talked that evening till twenty minutes to twelve. Then I turned him out, in order to get him back to Trinity before midnight. We said good-night at the door, and he promised to come in again for another talk next week.

Then I sat down and wrote a letter, directing the envelope to:

" Christopher Dell, Esq.,
" Martin's Farm,
" Near Maresfield,
" Sussex."

(II)

I carried about with me for the next few days a sensation like that of a man who has discovered a genius in a garret. I do not propose to write down all that Algy said to me during that last hour; but it was one of the most astounding conversations I have ever had. This boy, I found, had hardly read anything and, of course, he had ideas which even I could see were full of blunders. Yet, at the same time, his knowledge of what I should call " Divine Things " was simply extraordinary. I do not profess to be a judge of such matters; I take my Gospel-work simply from the Church; but even I could see that this young man had gone a long way — I do not mean in " dogma," because of this he knew hardly anything at all — but in that experimental knowledge of which at any rate Catholics believe theological statements to be the authoritative expression.

For example, he asked my opinion of what he called a very odd idea that had come to him — he did not remember having ever read it or heard it mentioned — but it was nothing else than the Law of Mystical Substitution. His was hardly a line of

thought current, let us say, at Eton or Crowston; yet he had it somehow. He quoted to me, oddly enough, in that connection, the incident of the young man in gaiters who had thrashed him. He told me that this had bewildered and shocked him for a time, and what had bewildered him more than anything else was the fact that he himself did not regret it in the slightest. I suggested — for I wished to test him — that he did not regret it simply because he happened to be a gentleman. But that did not satisfy him in the least. He had thought of it, and it was not that. It was, rather, he said, a certain knowledge that he had by his own actual pain and disgrace balanced to some degree the loathsomeness of the young man and the shame that Sybil suffered. Her laughter in the hall, too, fitted in, he told me. It was that that was needed. I asked him how he squared that with the Protestant doctrine of the Atonement; and he answered very sensibly.

In fact, as I say, I was astounded. Here was a boy with everything against him, who seemed, literally speaking, to have been caught up by the Supernatural out of a conventional family and life into a realm where I could not follow him at all except by hearsay. The end of it had seemed abrupt; it had been precipitated by the week in the previous September which has already been described, but, from

all that he said, I could see that it had been a-preparing a long time. Of course, I let him see nothing of what I thought. I snubbed him gently half a dozen times. He must have thought me a very dismaying kind of clergyman, but he came, again and again. Then I began to give him books to read, not controversial, but mystical. He had "Mother Julian of Norwich," "The Ascent of Mount Carmel," "Sancta Sophia" and "Heaven Opened." And then at last, a fortnight before Easter, I unmasked two guns, which I had been wheeling cautiously into position, full in his face.

The first was the "Penny Catechism."

I presented him with a copy in silence, as soon as he came into the room. He looked at the little purple, shiny book with unconcealed disgust; then he opened it and sat down, turning the pages.

"What's this all about?" he said.

"It's the 'Penny Catechism,'" I said; "it's what our children read. That's why I've given it to you."

"But I'm not a Catholic," he said.

"I know you're not; because you haven't the faintest idea what it's all about. But will you be good enough to take it away, and read it slowly through, three or four times?"

He shook his head doubtfully, pursing his lips a little.

"*I'll read it*, if you want me to. But, you know,

you'll never make me a Catholic. Besides, I didn't think —"

"Well?"

"Well — I didn't think that sort of a thing mattered much. Surely it can't possibly matter what denomination you belong to, so long as —"

Then I fired my gun.

I began with a discourse on Pride. I told him that for a young man to sit there in my chair and tell me, a Catholic priest and a convert, and fifteen years older than himself, and very much more than fifteen years wiser, that it couldn't possibly matter what denomination one belonged to, was impertinence enough; but to say, as in effect he had done, to such persons as . . . So-and-So and So-and-So, and a number more, that their step had been obviously unnecessary and that they would have done much better to stop where they were, was an impertinence before which my brain reeled. Finally, there remained the Holy Catholic Church throughout the world, and I mentioned a few Saints and Doctors whose names I thought he might conceivably have heard, declaring with one voice that she was the one link of Salvation. And he sat there.

. . .

He pointed out to me, with some shrewdness, that there were plenty of wise men and good outside the Church.

"No doubt," I cried at him, "and therefore I don't dare to say that their beliefs are obviously absurd. I say that I don't believe them, and you are at liberty to say that you don't believe in the Catholic Church, but to say more, as you did, is simple sheer pride."

He had nothing to say to that, and I proceeded.

I should think I spoke for twenty-five minutes; he interrupted me once or twice; but when I set before him the idea that the Church was literally the Body of Christ, assumed into union with His Person, experiencing therefore what He experienced on earth and sharing in His Prerogatives of Infallibility, Indefectibility and all that flowed from them, he interrupted me no more. . . .

Was it unfair? I think not. After all, for twenty-two years he had grown up in the protection of a Society whose boast is that of Free Enquiry. Then against what principle did he or I sin, I in giving him a little Free Information, and he in listening to it?

He waved his hands at last.

"Enough, enough!" he cried.

"Well; be good enough to read the 'Penny Catechism,'" I said. "And go to any Anglican Divine that you like. I'm not the least afraid. I only ask one thing — that you'll tell me what they say."

Then I unmasked my second gun.

I began by telling him about Christopher Dell, my friend, who had gone through fire and water, and come out, as the Scriptures say, into "a wealthy place." I concealed nothing, though I did not go into all the details, for, after all, I had Chris's leave to use it.

He sat dumb, looking at me. He heard the tale of sins, and unreality of the falling in love, and the rejection, and the revolt against God. Then he heard of Mr. Rolls, the Catholic mystic, who, by sheer brutality had first smashed Chris, driving him to the brink of suicide, and then healed him, making him like a little child in faith and love. But I didn't tell him that Lady Brasted was the girl in the story.

"Now," I said, "I'm going to stay with Chris in the Easter vacation. Dick Yolland's going to be there, and I've told Chris to keep a room for a friend of mine. Will you come?"

Algy moistened his lips.

"I will," he said. "Where does he live?"

"Not ten miles from Crowston, at Maresfield."

"I'll come," he said again. "When?"

"I'm going there ten days after Easter, and I'm going to stop there a week. You can come when you like."

"Yes — I'll come; I'll let you know. But — but why do you want me to come?"

"For two reasons. The first is that I want you

to see what Grace has done, and the second I won't tell you."

He looked at me a minute or two without speaking. I am sure he suspected a popish plot, and he was perfectly right in doing so.

"It's no good," he said; "I shall never be a Catholic."

"Tell me why you think that."

"Well — Lady Brasted — I told you about her. If that's what Catholics are like —"

"Have you ever thought what she'd be if she wasn't a Catholic?"

"Well — she'd be like other people."

"Oh, Algy! And it's other people you've been complaining of so much! I don't say she isn't conventional; but is it possible you don't see that all the good that there is in her comes simply and solely from her religion? She does her best to love God and her neighbor; and that's something surely."

I gave him another little lecture on charitableness then. I pointed out that Lady Brasted was perfectly sincere, that she took a great deal of trouble for the sake of her religion and that it was a far finer thing to believe in God and practice religion, even if it materialized a good deal in *prieu-dieux* and looking rapt, than not to have any religion at all, *and indefinitely* better, therefore, to have this than

to indulge in the vulgar and insincere cant of being too spiritual for any human system at all. I felt shockingly didactic and flat-footed; but it was necessary to humble this young man, if he was to become what I thought he might perhaps be capable of becoming. He took it very well; he grinned, and he flushed once or twice.

Finally, I begged him to remember that he was not yet acquainted with the Catholic Church, and therefore knew nothing at all of what he was talking about.

When he was gone, I took out a letter of Chris's and read it again. It ran as follows:

"MARTIN'S FARM, MARESFIELD.
"*March* 18.

"My dear man: Of course I shall be charmed to see your young man. I know nothing whatever about it all; but if you care to bring him, I'll tell you what I think. It seems to me very odd, when you tell me he isn't even a Catholic; but, after all, you know him and I don't. Dick's going to be here; have you heard he's going to be made a Monsignor? How exceedingly funny it is—'Monsignor Dick!'

"We can arrange about the other thing all right. Leave it to *me*.

"Oh! yes; tell him exactly what you like about me. I hope it'll do him good.

"Pray for me.

"Ever yours,

"C. D."

"P. S.— I've got a pony cart at last, so you'll be able to go over and say mass every day."

I put the letter away in my drawer, feeling more of a Popish Conspirator than ever.

(III)

Chris Dell's cottage at Maresfield was a very charming little place. It stood in a corner, rather off the high road, presenting only a blank wall to the dust of occasional cars. The cottage itself faced westwards, and a pleasant, fragrant little old garden came right up to its windows, crossed by paved paths, with a row of beehives at the lower end. Inside it was remarkably plain. There were no carpets or curtains in the house at all. The boards were a natural dark color, polished by generations of feet. Right out of the central room, once a kitchen, which Chris had turned into a kind of a living-hall, rose a staircase to the first floor. The kitchen that was in use opened through a door with a latch in it into the hall, with a scullery beyond. And, on the other side of the hall, were two tiny parlors. Upstairs

were four moderate-sized bedrooms, each with its bed partitioned off. The servants' rooms — for a housekeeper and a boy — were over the kitchen and scullery and communicated directly with them by a small staircase of their own which Chris had erected.

He seemed to have a succession of friends always staying with him, but these friends had to conform very rigorously to the rules of the house. Chris himself walked over to hear mass every morning at Crawley. He took no breakfast, and, even when he returned, was invisible till lunch at one o'clock. In the afternoon he entertained any one who might be staying with him by a walk or bicycle ride, and after tea vanished again upstairs. Dinner was at half-past eight, and from then till eleven everybody sat in the hall or one of the parlors. At eleven Chris went upstairs.

It was an extremely simple life, but to people who liked it, extremely pleasant. We were given real liberty. If one was sulky or meditative, Chris perfectly understood, and one walked alone. I used to go down there fairly often if I had something particular I wanted to finish in peace — or even sometimes to "make my soul."

And as for Chris himself —

His previous history has been told in the "Sentimentalists";* I had sketched it to Algy. The old

* This *is not intended* as an advertisement, but as a relation *of fact.*

Catholic, John Rolls, on dying five years before the present date, had continued by a bequest an income of two hundred pounds a year for the benefit of his friend, and Chris, ever since his return from Italy, five years before that, had lived this queer, lonely life at Maresfield. It is difficult to describe exactly what he did. Articles appeared from time to time, and an occasional book, very carefully written, bearing his name. They did not cause a blinding sensation, but his readers were quite constant and quite devoted. I have heard persuasive and quiet people speak of Christopher Dell with an enthusiasm which I dare not quote. His life was of a kind that strenuous workers would describe as slothful, and fussy people as dull; but it was neither. He slept six hours every night; his meals occupied him an hour and a half, and his recreations three. And all the rest of the time he was engaged in his room. . . . And he did not care a straw what people thought of him.

I arrived there in Lent week, about four o'clock on the Wednesday afternoon, to hear from the boy that Mr. Dell and Father Yolland were in the village; and I had hardly unpacked my things upstairs before I heard their voices in the garden. I rushed downstairs.

It was extraordinarily pleasant to see them again.

Chris rang for tea and sat down opposite to me where I could see him in the full light from the little leaded window. He was a little grayer, I thought, and I told him so. He was streaked on the temples and in his short, pointed beard.

"I am delighted to hear it," he said. "It is more in keeping with the Mysterious Recluse business which is supposed to have been my pose for the last ten years. I think I shall wear a little velvet skull-cap and cultivate a wan smile."

I turned to Dick.

"Where is your purple, Monsignor?"

"Don't be a funny ass," said Dick.

He, too, was a little older, as was but right. He was the Rector of a big London mission now and, I was pleased to observe, showed a suspicion of stoutness. This also was in keeping. Otherwise he was as before, a plain man, rather like an Irish terrier, with stiff sandy hair and a snub nose.

Then we settled down and talked extremely fast for a very long time. I heard bits of news, and gave other bits. It would have been of no interest to any one else. Finally, Chris asked me when Algy was coming. I told him that the young man was going to be brought over in a motor in time for dinner.

"That reminds me," said Dick. "I've got my aunt's motor here, and her chauffeur, all at her ex-

pense. She's gone to Lourdes for a fortnight. They're put up in the village."

"And that reminds me," said Chris. "We're going to use Dick's motor for our little affair. It holds five, you know."

Chris went upstairs at six o'clock, and I turned immediately to Dick.

"Well?" I said.

Dick waved his hands.

"My dear man, he's extraordinary. And those donkeys all told me that he was an incurable, and that once a poseur always a poseur. It's a black lie."

"Just the same then?"

"Just the same for ten years — ever since his smash. He does a little writing, you know, and gets poor beggars down here to reconsider themselves, and talks to them a bit, and they go back sane. It's what I said. It's just old Roll's mantle descended upon him. I know nobody else in the least like him."

I mused a minute or two.

"He's told you about Algy Banister?" I asked.

Dick nodded.

"Well; I tell you I feel like Columbus. If that boy isn't a born Contemplative, I've never heard of such a thing. It's like finding a lion in your garden. And if you only knew what he's had against *him!*"

"Why have you got him here?"

"Why, to consult a specialist — what else?"

"I supposed it was that," murmured Dick.

We both had a little office to say, so we wandered out into the garden presently and were soon at it, pacing up and down parallel paths, while the sun sank through the trees westwards, and the sky grew luminous and amber. I must confess that I suffered distractions, yet the peace of the place sank deeper every minute. The mellow, old-fashioned spring flowers, prisoned in their box hedges, began to doze; beyond the hedge in the meadow I could see the rabbits stealing out; yet the heart of the peace was not physical; that I knew very well. It was rather that a man lived here who generated it, for he had found the way to it through tribulation. It was all Chris. So I am afraid I thought a good deal about him. Even Algy faded, and as for Dick, he was to me during that hour nothing but a stoutish, kindly clergyman saying his prayers a dozen yards away. It was Chris to whom my thoughts wandered, that vivid, virile, black-eyed, bearded man, who lived a life that to most sane persons' minds must have seemed utterly without point or color. Yet it was not that he had not known these things. Yet here he lived, entirely content and serene, issuing queer books that on some hearts fell as harmless as

blunted arrows, and on others winged and pointed with flame, entertaining singular friends in his plain little house, living alone in his own room with the door locked for nineteen hours out of the twenty-four, losing his life to all appearances and, to his own mind at least, for the first time finding it.

As the village clock a hundred yards away beat out the hour of seven, across the boom came a throbbing: it grew louder and stopped, and I went down the flagged path to welcome Algy.

CHAPTER II

(1)

"YES," said Algy, an hour later, as we still sat over the dinner-table. "Mad. I am very sorry if you think me a conceited ass; but that is what I think."

He was a little flushed and excited with talk, for Chris was an admirable conversationalist and had succeeded, with remarkable skill, in making this young man feel at his ease with three Papists. It was the world in general and his own family in particular, whom Algy was calling mad just now.

Chris leaned back out of the full candlelight, smiling visibly.

"You do think so, Mr. Dell?"

"Well," drawled Chris, "not exactly conceited, but, shall we say, a little narrow-minded?"

Algy burst out again, recounting his experiences in the smoking-room at home. He pretended to a bewildered humility at the antics of his people.

"Surely it isn't I who am narrow-minded?" he cried; and I saw that the accusation had stung.

"My dear chap," said Chris, "you see, I don't

know your people, but what I do know is that you haven't any kind of business to say that anybody is narrow-minded just because he doesn't agree with your conception of the universe. Further, I think that it is you who are narrow-minded in not thinking it possible that they may have some function too."

Algy ground out his cigarette end in his coffee saucer. (I had been astonished during the last hour at the dinner Chris had provided. There had been three covers with cheese and fruit. Usually his friends were confined to one course, fruit and no coffee.)

"It is this," said Algy again, more deliberately. "I imagine we were sent into the world to fulfill some end. I don't see any end fulfilled by the kind of life that most people live. For myself —"

Chris leaned forward swiftly.

"Ah! yes. Speak for yourself," he said.

Algy fell into confusion. He stammered a sentence or two about finding out what the end was, and then pursuing it. All that he was certain of was that conventional life did not touch it.

"Then you're not certain of anything else yet?" pursued Chris relentlessly.

Algy glanced at me and away again. I know perfectly what he meant. It was that he had a kind of *ideal which* it was impossible to state in mixed com-

pany, and I agreed with him. It seemed to me that Chris was being rather tiresome and indelicate.

Chris leaned back once more, so far back that the shaded candles threw no light on his face. All that I could see was the glitter of his black eyes and white teeth. He spoke at first quietly, but afterwards with an extraordinary kind of intensity, and he delivered such a speech as I had never heard from him before.

I am not going to attempt to reproduce it here; it would not be decent. All that I know is that I sat perfectly still and never once glanced at either of the other two. I only looked now and again at Chris.

Briefly its point was this: That Almighty God had a scheme to work out of which it was absurd and profane for us to judge. Even Nature showed that; there were ten thousand mysteries of pain and sin which no religion worthy of the name even attempted to solve. He gave away with one hand all that sentimental scientists asked; he granted that the world was, apparently, full of irremediable wrong; he flung it down before himself and us and said that he had no answer. From that he deduced that we, obviously, were not responsible for anything except our own affairs and that for those we were responsible. Therefore, let Algy Banister hold his tongue about his people! They might have functions of

which he had no conception — at any rate it was their affair, not his.

What did matter then was Vocation. It was the only thing that did matter. Vocation did not mean that one life was, necessarily, better than another. It did not mean that other lives were necessarily insane. The only insanity lay in neglecting first to discover Vocation or, secondly, in neglecting it.

That, then, was Algy Banister's business as it was also Christopher Dell's for Christopher Dell, and that of these reverend fathers for these reverend fathers.

He proceeded to say some things about Almighty God and the soul that somehow made me feel extraordinarily small and unimportant — which, I hold, is always a wholesome feeling — and I have no doubt that he made Algy feel small to. (Dick, I don't believe, ever feels anything else, though he does not look it.) And he said it all with startling eloquence.

He said nothing about his own past, as most people would have done (an action which I think to be as offensive as undressing in public to exhibit wounds), and he said nothing whatever that could possibly flatter anybody that was present. In fact, for the first time since Algy's arrival he hinted at that young man's youth and inexperience, and finally ended by a sentence or two that had the effect of *making* not only ourselves but the world about us,

the table at which we sat, the rinds of orange peel on our plates and the fragrance of Algy's perished cigarette seem simultaneously rather less than nothing and rather more than everything — a truth which, to my mind, is both the beginning and the end of wisdom. I do not know how he did it; it was his air, his slight gestures, the modulations of his voice, fully as much as his words.

Altogether it was an extraordinary little speech.

Dick broke the silence that followed, characteristically. He sneezed twice, loudly, and the tension broke.

We dispersed somehow; that is to say that Chris and Dick drifted presently away into one of the parlors, and Algy and I remained at the table.

Almost immediately, however, he pushed his chair back, stood up and began to walk restlessly up and down the little room.

I watched him closely — the glimmer of his white shirt and the look on his face when he came into the candlelight; for I could see that my treatment had begun to tell. The puzzled look I had noticed in his eyes at our first meeting, and which had begun to go lately, had now deepened again. He seemed preoccupied. There was also about his air a kind of troubled energy that I had not seen before. He had the appearance of a man suddenly facing an

urgent problem. His hands were behind his back as he walked, his head was carried high, and he hardly seemed aware of my presence.

I knew perfectly what was troubling him; it was the strangeness of finding that there were other people in the world who had somehow got into the same region as himself. He had thought that he had discovered a new country, silent, mysterious and unpopulated, and behold! here was Christopher Dell, an old inhabitant of it all the while, knowing all about it, perfectly familiar with what he himself had thought to be unexplored woods and paths. I have seen that bewilderment before, pretty often.

So I observed Algy closely, waiting humbly upon his restlessness, watching, if I may say so, without pride, the movements of his mind as one may watch the activity within a glass bee-hive. Its inmates are free, yet they meet invariable laws with invariable instincts.

Algy was the first to speak, suddenly standing still opposite me.

"Good Lord!" he said. "And that's Mr. Dell."

"That's Mr. Dell," I said.

"Well — but — I don't understand. . . . Why does he go on living here if he feels like that? If I felt all that I'd . . . I'd. . . ."

"Well, what would you do?"

Algy began to walk up and down again. I looked

at him, at his white shirt-front in the dusk, his high collar and his boyish, troubled face.

"It's exactly what I feel myself," he said; "only I've never put it into words."

"Well, why don't you do whatever it is that you would do?" I asked.

"Because I don't know what it is," he snapped. "I only know —"

"My dear chap," I said, "hasn't it yet dawned on you that Chris Dell has found his Vocation? It's to live here, and to do his little jobs, and say his prayers. It doesn't matter in the slightest what we do, so long as we've got to do it."

He said nothing.

"And what you've got to do," I went on, "is to find out yours. You won't find it all in a minute. Don't be alarmed. Everybody who thinks at all goes through what you are going through."

"They don't," he said fiercely. "They just do what comes."

"And that's probably the very thing for them; it certainly is if they honestly think so."

Algy again made no answer, and then, rather rudely I thought, he strolled off after the others, and I was left meditating.

My meditations comprised a number of subjects, but the principal of them was a profound satisfaction with myself for having brought Algy down here.

Chris was exactly the man for him. Algy was a Protestant layman, and therefore a priest's advice must seem always slightly tainted by professionalism, since, oddly enough, theology seems the one subject in which proficiency is supposed to create bias rather than insight — and Chris was a layman too. And Chris was not in the least an ecclesiastical layman; on the contrary, he was obviously a real, though eccentric, man of the world. He had not had the slightest air of preaching just now. He had carried himself throughout in the manner of a man who is simply and entirely interested in his subject. He had talked as he might have talked on botany if he had a passion for that.

Further, I thanked my stars in that I saw Chris would shrink at nothing. He had got his scalpel in the right place at the first attempt — which was in the very middle of Algy's pride — yet without causing more pain than was necessary, and I perceived that if the saw had to be substituted it would presently be at work.

So I sat there and considered, listening to the voices in the parlor, until the door suddenly opened, and I heard Chris's voice very clear and sharp:

"All right, then; that's settled. We'll start at twelve and take lunch."

(II)

Dick's aunt's motor was a Humber, very smooth-running, very swift and very comfortable. The chauffeur was a man with a clean-shaven, sardonic face like a mephistophelean mask, who fell into a kind of trance so soon as he got his hands on the wheel and appeared to come up out of depths of contemplation when he was spoken to. By twelve we were started.

We had passed a most uneventful morning. All four of us went over to Crawley for mass, and Dick and I occupied adjacent altars. Chris and Algy remained at the end of the church. It was the first time Algy had ever heard mass, he told me some weeks later. We passed the hours till twelve mostly apart. Chris and I in our respective rooms. Once I looked out of the window and saw Algy with his hands behind his back going up and down the flagged path at the end of the little garden.

In the motor I was put beside the chauffeur, and the other three sat behind; so I did not have the advantage of their company. I was glad of that, for I was thinking steadily and swiftly, watching images pass before me, calculating possibilities, rehearsing conversations, hearing only the murmur of talk behind, the steady rush of the gear, and seeing the white *road, splitting* like a ribbon before the painted

snout of the machine, and the spring-lit fields, uphill and down dale, reeling to right and left.

Sussex is really an ideal country for such an expedition. It has all the necessary elements of tranquil interest, pleasing domestic villages to skim through, charming dips and hills to diversify the view and, now and again far away, the suggestiveness of high, naked Downs against the sky. The spring was in full crescendo; the high banks were crowded with flowers, a pleasant west-wind blew in our faces, the air was quick with larks; there was everywhere the scent and sound of noisy life.

I forget our route; once, I know, far away to the right, I saw a line of buildings on a hill and heard "Hayward's Heath" mentioned behind; but for the most part I was in that meditative daze in which the chauffeur was a proficient and perceived nothing between the minutest details of physical vision and the large topics on which I was internally engaged. After nearly two hours' running, Chris suddenly thrust his head from behind almost into my ear.

"Lunch," he said. "I think we might stop in a few minutes. What about that hill up there?"

I assented with a start. We were running along on the side of some long promontory of the Downs, with rich, flat country on our right, pricked here and there by high-shouldered little churches, set with *roofs among* the opening trees, and the bare, crisp-

grassed turf rising like tumbled old velvet up to the sky on our left. There was the sense of huge spaces about us, wider and more deep than ever shows itself in the fen-country where I live, since here and there the earth rises into a kind of competition with the sky and gives a measure by which distance may be judged, while in the fens it lies hopelessly vanquished, flat beneath an overpowering dome. This was certainly a place to lunch and lie on the back and stare up into the monstrous, towering, cloud-flecked vault.

The motor wheeled to the left, grumbled a little over the broken road, turned again to the right, sped softly and heavingly over springy turf and slid down into motionlessness.

It was a little while before we found an entirely suitable place; but at last we found it, under the shelter of a high bank, convenient to the back, looking straight out northwards on to the swelling, luxuriant country that somehow had the air of an academy picture. It was exquisitively arrayed. The ground fell away almost precipitously at our feet straight down into the trees, diversified by wind-swept gorse; beyond began the flat country, a huddle of fields, copses, villages, stretching away up through shades of green, blue and peacock, into the intense violet of the horizon. Here, too, the larks were at the height of their singing. Two hundred

yards away, like a child's painted toy dropped from heaven, rested the strangely incongruous motor with the sardonic chauffeur fumbling for food under the seat. I caught the flash of paper as I undid my own sandwiches.

Swift motion through the air always produces in me a kind of stupidity, or perhaps it may be the supreme sanity. I am not sure. At any rate, everything seemed to me rather unreal. When I was able to stand off from myself, all this made a very pleasant experience — we four on the breezy down, each with his packet and bottle, with that immense view and vital air to soothe and enliven us. But I have only the most disconnected ideas as to what we talked about. Once I think Chris and Dick quarrelled as to our exact position. A map was produced and pinned down by stones, then it was snatched at and torn; but even now I forget what the point was. Algy said a little later that it was almost impossible to flick a cork off a table if you walked up to it with outstretched arm — unless you knew the trick. Dick said he would undertake to do it three times out of four, and a bet of fourpence was entered on Algy's cuff, a penny for each attempt. I said that I believed I had just caught meningitis, since I felt a strange pressure on the top of my head. And so on. It was poor silly stuff, *not at all like* our high communings of the evening

before. Finally, we played an elaborate game with corks, of which I entirely forget the rules. The only point that I remember was that we all flatly contradicted Dick who was the master of the revels, and who claimed with some pathos to know what the rules were, since he had himself invented them.

Then Algy lit a cigarette with a motor-fuse that filled the air with sickening sweetness. We excavated a grave, buried the paper and string and fuse and stood up, stretching. The moment had come.

Now Chris insisted on this, that no one but Algy himself should introduce the subject. We had made it possible, he said! it was our part to bring him to what might prove to be Pisgah, and there we must leave it. Whatever happened, he declared, would not be in the least final. He was not superstitious, but since he did happen to believe that Providence actually controlled details, it was but reasonable to allow Him to do so at one or two points. If Algy asked his question — well, that would prove nothing; it would be no more than the faintest whisper of encouragement. If he did not ask the question — again it would not be in the least final; only it would show that this particular suggestion was not the way to be pursued any further. I do not say that I altogether agreed with Chris. It

seemed to me rather fortuitous, but I had known him manage matters before now with a very remarkable skill. After all, it was like the throwing up of one feather; it might at least be taken to indicate the set of the breeze at that instant.

Algy stood, stretching himself with clawing hands, clear against the sky, on a little hummock of ground to my left, a figure dramatic in more than the artistic sense. Chris, close beside me, was clinking bottles together. Dick was still on his back a little down the slope, chewing grass. I must confess that my heart began to quicken a little.

Algy finished his long stretch, and relaxed suddenly.

"I say, what's that?" he said, nodding out in the direction of a long line of buildings pricked by a tall spire scarcely visible half a dozen miles away.

(III)

He had said it, and I could not resist a glance at Chris. The clinking still continued for a moment or two, and not the faintest emotion was perceptible on his face.

"What's that place?" asked Algy again. "Is it a lunatic asylum?"

Chris stood up.

"Which place?"

Algy pointed.

"Oh — that's the Carthusian monastery."

"Carthusian? What's that?"

"They're Contemplatives," said Chris deliberately. "They don't preach or write, or go out at all, except once a week for a walk."

"Eh?"

"They're Contemplatives," said Chris again, with his hands in the pockets of his jacket.

"Do you mean to say — do you mean to say —? Well, what do they do, then?"

"Each of them has a cell, with three or four rooms, a wood shed and a garden. They have a church where they meet for offices and mass three times a day. They have one good meal in the day. They say the night-office from about eleven till one every night. The rest of the time, except when they sleep, they do their best to remain in the state of prayer."

Algy looked at Chris sideways. His lips were parted, and his eyes had an odd, doubtful look in them. Chris spoke as unemotionally as if reading from a guide-book.

"But what's the object?" he said suddenly.

"Well the idea is that the real thing that matters is the inner life. You know, there's a good deal to be said for that, really."

"Go on, please."

"There's not much else to say. For exercise

they cut wood or dig in the garden. There are both lay brothers and priests there. They mortify themselves continually —"

"Mortify? How do you mean?"

"Well, they scourge themselves. They hardly ever speak. They never touch meat. They are under absolute obedience."

"Scourge themselves?"

"Why not?"

"But why? . . . Is it really true? I thought that was all bunkum." He spoke with startled concern.

Chris drew a breath.

"My dear chap, that's too big a question. It's because of sin. Our Lord was scourged, you see."

There was dead silence. I glanced at Dick and saw that that priest was lying perfectly still in the warm sunshine, but a grass-stalk no longer protruded from his mouth.

Algy stared out again at the white line and the squat tower beyond the trees.

"How many are there?" he said suddenly.

"The last time I was there, there were about a hundred and fifty. Some French Fathers had joined them."

"You've been there!"

"Five years ago I tried my vocation there."

Algy turned on him full. I could see that he was pale with excitement.

"You've been there, you!"

"I was there for about eight months."

"What happened?"

"I was told I had no vocation."

Chris was looking at him now, too; and for a moment I could see that each was studying the other in a kind of wonder. I felt extremely small and unimportant. Far overhead poured out a torrent of ecstatic song from a bubbling heart of bird-life, and down here two men looked at one another with a House of Contemplatives before them.

"Will you tell me about it?" said Algy softly.

"I will tell you anything you wish to hear, but not now."

Once more Dick broke the tension.

"I say, you chaps; let's be getting on again."

To this day I do not know whether this remark of Dick's was simple innocence or the most superb art. I have never asked him. It was like his sneeze the night before. All I know is that what the world calls sanity rushed upon us again with its kindly embrace. I stood up perfectly natural, and made a remark about the chauffeur. Chris stooped and gathered up his bottles. Dick rolled to his feet, and Algy took out his cigarette case.

Our journey home was completely uneventful.

Dick was put in front, and I took his place with the other two. We talked of this and that and the other. Once a small boy, on seeing us unexpectedly whisk round the corner upon him, crouched against railings with clenched hands and squealed like a terrified mouse. Once I observed with interest a colony of rooks in the high trees overhead busy on an exceedingly Active Life with sticks and straws. As we went, the evening light drew level behind us, the flitting tree-stems and the rich pastures were bathed in gold, a little church issued its brazen summons for evening prayer, and I noticed a clergyman accompanied by his wife emerge from the vicarage gate.

And so the panorama passed, and we sat on padded cushions and watched it.

I do not quite know what was the conclusion of my meditations, or even if I arrived at any at all. I made remarks now and then, but they were no more than floating sticks on my stream of thought. All kinds of reflections passed before me.

There was first a kind of wonder as to whether we were at all superstitious, and next a doubt as to whether we were not too managing. The managing element was represented, it seemed to me, by our careful plot to bring Algy within range of St. *Hugh's,* Parkminster, and superstition by the cu-

rious fulfillment of our expectation that he would put his question. It had been Chris's plan, and he had said most emphatically that it would prove nothing either way. It is an extraordinarily difficult problem as to how much one must interfere and how far refrain. Certainly I should not have proposed such a plan myself.

And, in any case, were we not putting the cart a very long way in front of the horse? This boy was not even a Catholic! Certainly he had said some remarkable things to me at Cambridge, but boys do say remarkable things. The only significant point about Algy was the fact that he did not seem ever to have had any opportunity of learning them. Besides, they did not sound second-hand. That was at least something; and it had made a strong enough impression on my mind to cause me to arrange this visit to Chris, a thing I do not do once in a twelvemonth.

But, again, was it in the least fair? Here was this boy, obviously romantic and impressionable, obviously out of touch with his world. Was it fair to confront him suddenly with the most amazing product of the human race, a Contemplative House? (for I had no sort of doubt any longer that he would ask to go over and see it). I argued this once more with myself. It was true that he was impressionable, but God had made him so,

and therefore, since he must always be taking in impressions, why should he not have all sorts presented to him? In no sense were we compelling him. The world had had twenty-two years' unlimited opportunities of influencing him, and twenty-two years is a good slice out of life. Was it so unfair, then, to let him have a glimpse of another side, of an objective fact to meet his subjective desires? Of course, if the Contemplative Life were an illusion, a morbid and artificial dream, an outraging of the nature that Providence intends us all to develop to the full, why then all these objections would hold. But you must please remember that I am perfectly convinced of the precise opposite. Very well, then. It was a matter of Vocation. It was Vocation; that, and nothing else. The only question was, Had Algy got it?

I was so deep in self-contradiction and wonder and pity that I ceased presently to attend any more to the other two. I was sitting in the corner with Algy next me, and heard their voices only as in a dream.

Suddenly Chris leant over and touched me.

"Asleep!" he said.

I jumped.

"Certainly. not."

"Well, then, are you fit for another to-morrow? Mr. Banister wants to go over to St. Hugh's."

CHAPTER III

(1)

MY drowsiness was partly explained on the following morning; for during the night the clouds had consolidated somewhat into a kind of breathless, motionless, overhead haze, and the brisk air of the previous day had settled down into itself like stagnant water. It promised to be one of those still, electric, ominous days that occasionally fall in spring as summer heats begin to develop. There might be thunder, or there might not.

We were all rather silent that morning, and I suppose we were all thinking of the same thing. At any rate, about eleven o'clock, Dick came out to me as I paced the garden. He took me by the arm.

"Look here," he said, "I'm thoroughly uncomfortable."

It was a relief to me to hear that some one else was suffering.

"What business is it of ours?" he went on, beginning to walk with me. "It's a real plot, and I'm not at all sure that it's fair."

"Where's the unfairness?"

"Besides, it's perfectly mad," he said, ignoring my *question*. "*Why*, he's not a Catholic. He's a

romantic young ass who doesn't know anything."

"Where's the unfairness?" I repeated.

"It's playing with fire."

I summoned my resolution.

"Look here, Dick. You're a Catholic and a priest. Therefore you believe, I imagine, that God has control of details. You also believe that God acts through men. Very well, then; I ask you again, Where's the unfairness?"

He made a demurring sound as he walked in slow step with me, staring uneasily at the path. I went on, unflinching.

"And, as you say, he's not even a Catholic. Then there's one more obstacle to all this coming to anything. I say again, isn't it simply stupendously unlikely? He's first got to be a Catholic; then he's got his home-duties — he's eldest son, you know. Then, even if he has something that may conceivably resemble a Vocation — and, after all, you know, that's extraordinarily unlikely; the only signs are some of the things he said to me, and, as you say, he's a romantic young ass — but even if he has a drawing towards this, there are all the exterior obstacles to be overcome. Then, even if these are overcome, even if his desire comes to anything, and persists, he's got to be accepted. Then there's his Postulary; do you know that at least half who

get even as far as that, leave after a week? Then there's his Novitiate — that's a year; then there are the simple vows, and that's four years. My good man, you're simply mad."

We walked in silence.

Then I made one more appeal to my own common-sense and his own.

"Look here," I said. "It's we who are the romantic asses. Why on earth can't you take it simply? He wants to see St. Hugh's. And we're going over by motor to see it. What's the matter with that?"

"I didn't like the coincidence yesterday," he said slowly.

"My good man, you must confess that we made that coincidence extremely probable! Honestly, I don't see how he could have helped asking what the big building was. It's perfectly natural. Remember, at first he thought it a lunatic asylum. That's very much what most people continue to think it."

"Do you really think it was natural?"

"Dick, you're a fool. If it isn't natural, why then, I suppose it was supernatural, and isn't that good enough? What more do you want? Either it's the result of our machinations, in which case it won't come to anything, or else it's God's Providence, and in that case —"

I pressed his arm suddenly; for through the garden-gate ten yards away came Algy, up from the village.

He looked very youthful and secular as he came towards us, in a flat cloth cap, short jacket, trousers and brown boots. Anything less mystical and Contemplative I have never set eyes on. He was smoking a briar-pipe with a cheerful and brisk air.

"By George, I thought I was late," he said. "Is it eleven-thirty or twelve that we start?"

I told him twelve, as he turned to walk with us.

"How far's the place?"

"We shall get there about two. We're to lunch on the way, Chris says."

"Right. Is it a big place?"

"It's the biggest cloister in the world."

"Really, you're ragging."

"Indeed I'm not. It's a mile round."

"Good Lord! Why does nobody ever hear of it, then?"

"Well — Carthusians don't exactly advertise, you know."

He was silent a moment.

"I say; I'd no idea Mr. Dell had ever been there."

"Oh, yes."

Then Algy stopped dead.

"By George, I forgot. He asked me to go and *see him* at half-past."

He hurried into the house.

I waited till the door had shut.

"Well?" I said. "Doesn't that reassure you?"

"Not at all. It's just that kind of man who does go in. They're nearly always about twenty, and they're always cheerful."

"Oh! Dick, you're hopeless," I said.

I don't know at all what Chris said to Algy during that half-hour, but the boy did seem a trifle subdued as we climbed into the motor a minute or two after twelve. I suppose that it was then that Chris fulfilled his promise of telling him something more about the Carthusians. Algy brought with him a small, green, faded book, and a few minutes after we started I leaned back from my place in front and asked the loan of it.

It proved to be an English translation of a French book by a Carthusian describing the contemplative life, entitled "The Monastery of the Grande Chartreuse"; it was bound in gray-blue paper, published by Messrs. Burns and Oates, and bore on its outside a medallion of a cross surmounting a globe surrounded by six stars, with the inscription, STAT CRUX VOLVITUR ORBIS.

Then I opened it and began to read.

I was really startled when at last I was tapped on the shoulder.

"Lunch," announced Chris.

I was just drawing near to the end of the book — I had been reading for over an hour as we slid and throbbed through the country lanes — and while the others got the things out, I still walked up and down on the grass by the side of the road, finishing it to myself. It was an extraordinarily fascinating little book, fascinating from its naked simplicity. It did not tell me anything I did not know before. The printed words were rather as a grave, austere voice telling me platitudes of a startling originality.

Even as I ate, sitting on a stile, the book lay on the foot-rest by my side, and as soon as I had done I opened it once more.

"Look here," I said. "Just listen to this. Dionysius says —"

"Kindly put that away," said Chris.

"But just listen —"

"We will not listen; we are out of doors. Look about you instead. You haven't said a word since we started."

I obeyed, but there was not much to look at. We had halted in a hollow this time, at the bottom of a deep pit. On either side the hills rose up. The horizon was not a quarter of a mile away in any direction, and everywhere were woods, breaking out into the young green of spring. But the clouds

were gathering overhead. That ominous stillness lay over us as it had done all the morning.

Perhaps it still affected me, for I had still nothing to say. The other three talked in low voices; the chauffeur's head could be seen over the motor fifty yards away as he ate his meal. My head was still full of the book, of its praise of silence and solitude, of its extraordinarily confident claim that in these were to be found such experiences of the ultimate Reality as the noisy, superficial world knows nothing of. Again, as yesterday, only even more strongly, all things that I looked upon seemed little more than a painted scene. Yes; there was a carpet of bluebells flinging its fringe up to the hedge opposite, and stretching for an unknown distance into the crowding woods; a chuckling little runnel of water was at my feet, and a fragment of paper hung there, below the lip, caught in the grasses, and here were three men, close to me, with faces and bodies and brains . . . and what did it all amount to? And presently we should see other men who . . .

"Where are we?" I said at last.

"We're about half a mile from West Ginstead."

We put the things together again presently, went back to the motor and climbed in. The others also seemed rather subdued. I glanced at Algy once or twice, but there was nothing particular to notice. He looked as he had this morning, very youthful

and ordinary and well-dressed. He threw away his cigarette as he took his place.

I have looked at a map once or twice since that day and perceive that we must have passed through a village, but all that I entirely forget. I only remember a little, new, yellow brick house with a fat man smoking a cigar in the garden in front. I have a terrible habit of conjecturing; and I remember that I became entirely absorbed in thoughts of the fat man, as we spun on towards the monastery. I gave him a fat wife and a daughter or two, I dubbed him retired grocer and Baptist, I even furnished his house for him, with a stuffed trout in the dining-room, and decided that he had just dined there heavily with a glass of port wine to end up with. And now he was smoking a fourpenny cigar in his own front garden, in a basket chair, and contemplating those who went by. Well; that was his theory of life. He would say that he had earned it, and he would be considered by practically all the world to be right. And here, nearer every instant, was a company of men who had quite another theory, who believed that Pain had a function in life, that material comfort was the least of all small things, that reality lay in what was unseen, that silence and solitude led to an initiation of which the world knows nothing, that the "kingdom of *heaven*" suffers violence and that the violent, not

the acquiescent, nor the contented, nor the sitters in arm-chairs, take it by force. Which then, was right? for it was difficult, in spite of the amazing eccentricities of Vocation, to think that both were. In fact, it might almost be said that one theory must be simply insane. Which? . . .

We turned abruptly off the high-road at a lodge, spun up a short kind of curved avenue and halted at a gate resembling that of a college. Overhead, beyond the white stone edge, lay an indigo cloud, heavy with thunderous menace.

Then I perceived that we had arrived.

(II)

Chris drew down the bell-pull; there was a jangle within, and almost immediately we heard steps approaching. Then the wicket opened, and a tall, brown-faced young man in a brown stuff habit, girded with a leather belt, looked out. His face suddenly smiled tranquilly as he saw Chris, and he stepped back, motioning us to enter. Chris went first, then Algy, then Dick, then I.

"You have come to see us again, then, Mr. Dell," said the young man, as we halted in the archway.

"Why, yes," smiled Chris; "and I have brought some friends. This is Mr. Banister, a Protestant, who wants to see what a Religious House is like. Can we see Father Johnson?"

"Oh! I think so."

Then we went across the court that leads towards the church.

We were all silent. For myself, I never want to say a single word in these places! I am much too busy, but I looked once or twice at Algy and saw in his face such a portentous gravity that I really laughed aloud. Even Dick wore an expression of stern stupidity, and I have no doubt that I did the same. Chris alone was perfectly natural. The Brother pointed out one or two things to us, the statue of St. Hugh over the west end of the church, and so forth, but we said nothing, and presently we came into the church itself, passing a great cat that sunned himself on the steps.

It is not a very beautiful church. It has not that austereness that one would expect; on the contrary, it is rather pretty, with its red lamps, its apse, its rows of polished stalls. Yet the knowledge that here it is that Carthusians praise God in community, the lay brothers in the ante-chapel, and the Fathers in the choir, the sight of the lanterns against the wall, the vast books from which they recite — the knowledge and the sight of all this tends to make one forget the rest. I expect I looked as solemn as the others. We said a prayer or two, while Algy stood severely upright beside us; *and then* we came out again.

We arrived, finally, in a strangely unattractive room on the first floor. It looked like a half-converted "morning-room," like a penitent in a ball-dress. There was a faded gilt cornice running round the high ceiling; there was a rather elaborate fire-place; the floor was waxed, and a tall window looked out on to a piece of land that was half garden, half meadow. A tall man in the white habit and a large straw hat was raking on the path beneath. There was very little furniture in the room — a round table, half a dozen chairs, a prie-dieu with a plaster head of St. Bruno and a faded mat before the fire.

"Part of the old country-house," said Chris abruptly. "Beastly, isn't it?"

"The parlor," observed Dick.

Algy said nothing; he stood with his back to the fire-place, surveying.

Then the door suddenly opened, and a little man in white came in, closing it behind him.

Now I wish to describe this man carefully, because he made a very singular and wholly indefinable impression upon me. As he shook hands, first with Chris, and was then introduced to each of us, making us sit down and listening to explanations, I was observing him violently.

He was small, not above five feet four; he was dressed in a grayish white of some woolly-looking

material; his scapular was linked, front to back, at the height of his knees, by a broad band. His hands were hidden, as he sat, beneath his scapular that, like the tunic beneath, fell into stiff, ungraceful folds. His whole head and face were shaven to a blueish black color, and the rest of his complexion was almost colorless. His mouth was small and compressed, his nose was slightly hooked, and his ears projected a little. His voice was almost toneless, it said things without a touch of emotion, and he seemed rather tired. But he was not at all pathetic or picturesque. He wore ordinary black boots.

To analyze in words a psychological impression is always difficult, but with this man it appears impossible, for there seemed to be no atmosphere about him at all. Yet there was one sensation, that I remember distinctly, of a negative character. It was that, as I looked at the others in his presence, the three seemed strangely shrunken and mean. It was as if we were all plebeians in the presence of a prince — coarse, ill-bred, empty-headed bourgeois. Yet there was not in his air anything remarkable. It was we who were remarkably small and rather coarse, not he that was remarkably great or ethereal. He seemed the normal man, we the abnormal. *He* did not bring with him a spiritual aroma such as *I had expected.* He did not say searching or sug-

gestive or oracular sentences. He told us small facts as to the number of monks at present in the house — there were about a hundred fathers, I think he said — he told us about the room we were sitting in and the date of the foundation of the house, all in that same rather insignificant but perfectly steady voice. Looking back on him now, I think I should say that he was a man simply and entirely uninterested in the things that interest the world and perfectly secretive about things that interested him. Things other than his own business had no personal relation to him at all. It was nothing at all to him that his parlor resembled a fifth-rate morning-room, nor that four strangers from the world sat there eying and listening to him. I could see that, if he had permitted himself to be so, he would have been bored. As it was, he took it all in the day's work; yet, so far as he had any inclination at all, it was for a return to his cell as soon as might be.

Here, too, then, I began to construct an atmosphere for him, but it was chiefly of this negative description. The small things that make up the life of the rest of us, conversations, sights, books, railway trains, business, plans for the future — these things simply were not for him. About him lay silence, behind him lay — well, his personal history (he had once been an Anglican clergyman) in front of him lay a future which was precisely the

same as the present, days and nights following one another like shadows on a lighted wall, until they ceased and he died.

Chris stood up suddenly.

"Well, father, we musn't keep you. May the Brother show us one of the cells? Mr. Banister is anxious to see one."

The priest stood up too. A rumble of thunder sounded from far away.

"Certainly," he said. "I will send him to you directly."

He put out his hand. "Fortunately you will be under cover," he said. "I think there will be a storm."

"Pray for us, father," said Chris.

"I will do so," said the priest. Then he took a hand of each of us, made a little bow and went out.

We passed out, too, presently, led again by the brown-clad Brother, all in silence, down the stairs, and then along one of the sides of the huge cloister.

It is so huge that the mind simply does not take it in. One appears to be passing down a low, white, vaulted tunnel running to a vanishing point in front, pierced by wide windows looking on to a stretch of turf and bushes. There were doors on the left-hand, with names and Latin texts inscribed over them. Once or twice we caught sight of a

grave white figure in the distance; but the silence was profound. There might have been no world in existence.

We stopped at last at a door. This door was pierced by a shuttered hatch; and over it were written the words:

IN COELO QUIES

The Brother unlocked it, and we went in.

We found ourselves in a small, paved vestibule, perhaps twelve yards long and three across. At the further end, on the left, rose up a flight of stairs. We went past these stairs and turned to the right into a room of which one wall was wanting, opening straight and flat on to a small garden about twice the size of the vestibule, walled high all around. Half this garden contained cabbages, and the other half was turf with a path bisecting it.

"The workshop," said the Brother briefly. "And if a monk wants fresh air he can always dig in this garden."

He proceeded to explain the plan of the cell, telling us that they were all alike. Each was an oblong, of which the ground-floor consisted of that we had seen — vestibule, workshop, and garden; the first-floor had two rooms built over the workshop; these we should see immediately. In wet weather the monk could walk up and down his vestibule. At no point in the cell or the garden could he be

overlooked by anybody, the seclusion was complete.

We said nothing at all — there was nothing to say — and in silence again we followed the Brother up the stairs and into the first of the two rooms. This had a window looking into the garden, a small image of Our Lady stood on a shelf opposite the door, and there was nothing else at all in the room. The floor was bare wood, the walls and ceiling were white-washed.

"Once," said the Brother, "each monk used to cook his own food, and used this room for that. Now it is found more convenient to have the food cooked in the kitchen and pushed in through the hatch downstairs. This next is the room where the monk practically lives."

We followed him through a second door, and stood looking, while he explained. On our right was a window, also overlooking the garden, and before it stood a wooden table and chair. On our left was a curious wooden construction, resembling three low stalls in a stable. That nearest us held a prie-dieu and a seat opposite it; that in the middle held a low bed; the third in the further corner of the room was empty.

The thunder burst in long peal after peal as we came in, flinging its echoes everywhere in the great stone buildings about us.

"He says the Little Office of Our Lady there,"

said the Brother, raising his voice a little and pointing to the prie-dieu. "All say it at the same time, each in his cell — in fact all the office that is not said in church is said there — in the middle division he sleeps, and in the third he washes and so forth and keeps his things. He dines here, at the table, and washes up the plates afterwards."

"What about the food?" asked Dick in a sepulchral voice.

"Oh! the food is excellent and well cooked. Dinner is three or four courses, without meat, and a bottle of wine each day. Supper is the bread and wine left over from dinner.

"And that's all?"

"That's all," smiled the Brother.

We stood looking and reflecting.

For myself I must confess that the faint sense of horror of which I had at first been aware, was rapidly passing. All seemed so snug and compact and well-ordered. Certainly it was slavery of a kind, in which every duty must be done in a particular way and at certain fixed hours, yet there was in it a sense of freedom too that is indescribable. The lust of possession, the complications of intercourse, the distractions of arranging and moving, provision for the future — all these things that occupy the rest of us for nine-tenths of our waking hours were entirely absent. The world is simply gone, there

remain only the flesh and the devil. And it was in this room, exactly, among precisely these surroundings that the conflict goes on, in dead silence and seclusion, until death.

Yet I said nothing, again there was nothing to say, but I felt rather more at my ease as I went down the stairs again presently after the Brother and came out into the cloister.

Here however a significant thing happened.

As the Brother stepped out before us into the cloister, he suddenly recoiled and made a little gesture, and I who was next to him saw, before stepping backwards, that a kind of procession was approaching. Then I too stepped back and waited, and so we all stood in silence.

Then across the door there passed a figure, hooded and clothed all in white, pacing slowly with hands hidden. As he saw us he raised his hands an instant to his hood in salutation. Then he was gone, and another came, and another, and another. Two of them were in black, one of them, a postulant I suppose, was in wide black cloak and biretta, with a young, Spanish-looking face. For the rest, for there were ten or twelve in all, I should say, there was no common characteristic except that of colorless tranquillity. Some were fat faces, even gross, ill-shaven, some lean and fierce, and so they went *past, in* Indian file, each walking four or five paces

from his fellows in front and behind, all close to the wall. Yet the pause, the silence, the slight salutation, the hush in which we stood, made the little ceremony extraordinarily impressive. It was like a procession of Princes, so stately and so reverent was it. There was "no beauty in them, that we should desire them," yet there was that unmistakable stamp of Royalty. So they passed, accompanied by the rolling of the passing storm. Beyond them the rods of rain, lit by an emerging sun, flashed incessantly in the cloister-garth.

On the way back to the entrance, passing again through the cloisters, down which, at the dead of night, pass the ghostly white figures each lighting himself with a lantern to church, we looked into the chapter-house, where, above the altar and at the opposite end, are painted terrible frescoes, streaming with blood, representing the company of Carthusian fathers suffering at Tyburn under much-married Henry Tudor. It was odd to think that these white, grave figures looked each day at such pictures, showing them what discipline could do, and what they too must be ready to bear if the call should come. Yet was it not possible that the conquests silently wrought out in this seclusion were at least as supreme as those on noisy Tyburn? I thought of the little red-streaked scourges.

At the entrance once more, we shook hands with the Brother, after writing our names in the little book in the lodge. He stood waiting while the chauffeur wound up the handle of the motor, and as we moved off he nodded and smiled at us pleasantly. The rain too was over, and a great fresh joyousness rose from the soaked earth.

As we passed out at the gate I turned to Algy, and for the first time noticed how white his face looked.

"Well?" I said cheerfully.

He compressed his lips an instant, then he opened them suddenly.

"I think it is just . . . just damnable."

CHAPTER IV

(1)

MONSIGNOR RICHARD YOLLAND rang the bell at 71 Egerton Crescent, just two months later, and turned round to wait. It was a very hot cloudless day in June, about half-past four in the afternoon. As he said to himself cynically on his way there, he didn't want to go to tea with anybody, and he didn't want to go to anything with Lady Brasted. Yet he was combining both, in answer to an earnest little note from that lady, begging him to come and meet a young man of whom she had great hopes. Then the door opened and he went in.

The little hall was very Italian and very pious, and he looked as he had looked before at the Della Robbia over the Elizabethan chest and the chaste fleur-de-lis wall-paper, vaguely grateful that the Catholic religion had other sides than that which attracted Lady Brasted. He always had a faint sensation of spiritual stuffiness in this house. Then he had passed up the stairs, heard his name announced, gone forward, and, as he shook hands with his filmy ethereal hostess, perceived that Algy Banister, in a black tail-coat and gray trousers, was sit-

ting on the edge of his chair, embarrassed by a cup of tea.

He had heard no news whatever of this young man since he had said good-bye to him at the door of Chris's cottage on the morning after the visit to Parkminster. I had had one letter of inquiry from him at Cambridge, but Algy had not been near me again, and I had nothing to say. And now here he was.

"Dear Monsignor, how good of you!" murmured Lady Brasted. "May I present Mr. Algy Banister . . . Monsignor Yolland."

Dick repressed his annoyance at the word "present," and laughed outright.

"There is no need," he said. "I know Mr. Banister."

During Lady Brasted's cooings and exclamations, the two shook hands. Dick guessed he had been only a second string to a Jesuit who had failed his hostess and that no hint had been given to Algy as to whom he was to meet.

"We met down at . . . at — in Sussex," he said, suddenly confounded.

"Not at Crowston?" murmured Lady Brasted, busy at the tea-cups.

"No," said Dick brutally, and threw a wild glance at Algy.

Fortunately the other understood that he was to

hold his tongue, and then presently they were off in small-talk.

Algy's statements were difficult to diagnose. He seemed bored, resentful, peevish, shy and, on the whole, pleased to see Dick. He tended to hold his chin in the air and to talk in a head-voice, and Dick saw plainly enough that Lady Brasted had been at him. And then, with almost indecent haste she opened fire once more.

"I have been telling Mr. Banister that he really must come with me to Farm Street to hear Father Badminton. It is wonderful, wonderful."

Dick munched a small Queen-cake.

"Mr. Banister tells me he has never even been inside Farm Street. How fortunate that you already know him, Monsignor! He is up in town for a fortnight. You must take him everywhere, everywhere; and particularly Farm Street."

Dick took another Queen-cake.

"I have been telling him that I always call the Jesuits the Fifth Mark of the Church. Nothing but the Catholic Church could have produced such an Order."

Dick had heard this pious piece of humor more than once from Lady Brasted, and it had now lost its freshness. He loved the Jesuits, too; in fact, his own confessor was one; but he wondered whether the Jesuits particularly loved Lady Brasted.

"Now you will, won't you, Monsignor?"

Dick was beginning to see red, or at least a faint pink. He felt exactly as he would have felt at the sight of a precocious child fingering a delicate piece of mechanism. Here was the soul of this boy, as he knew very well, in an exceedingly fragile state and as complicated as any psychological specimen could be. No priest in the world, who knew his business, would dare to treat it in this way, and here was this well-meaning woman twisting it about, poking her fingers into it, spinning the wheels, and trying to regulate and rearrange it without the faintest idea of what she was doing. Once or twice before he had been angry enough at being hauled into this room to administer remarks to budding proselytes, but this particular case was worse than all. He turned abruptly to Algy.

"Where are you staying?" he said.

"Uncle," said Algy.

"Up long?"

"A fortnight."

Lady Brasted paused tactfully in her clinking among the tea-things to let these precious remarks sink into the young man's mind, and then began again.

"You will take him; won't you, Monsignor?"

"I should think probably not," said Monsignor.

"Mr. Banister's got his affairs, I should think. So have I."

There was an uncomfortable little pause. Then Dick overcame his annoyance and turned frankly to his hostess —

"I'm fearfully busy, you know," he said. "I simply haven't a minute —"

Lady Brasted rustled reassuringly. It was part of her pose never to be disturbed.

"Oh! I know, I know," she said; and went off into a torrent of conversation about small ecclesiastical affairs. Dick played his part and observed Algy, whose atmosphere darkened every instant.

It was plain enough to the priest that if anything on earth, or under it, could hinder this young man from becoming a Catholic, it would be Lady Brasted's methods. The very room was an obstacle to conversion. It was all in white and gold and blue, polished boards, drawn Venetian shutters, scented heavily with tuberoses. A great bowl of them, in iridescent glass, stood on a table between the windows, sending up its heavy immoral fragrance towards an ivory Piéta that hung on the wall. On a carved bracket above the mantelpiece stood a black Madonna, dripping with beads; and round the walls were hung a succession of Italian water-colors, secular in subject, and ecclesiastical by a kind of subtle,

tactful suggestiveness. He wondered what on earth Lord Brasted made of it; till he reflected upon the small, middle-aged sort of room downstairs where he himself had once smoked a cigar. The husband, no doubt, regarded the wife's religion exactly as he did her frocks and jewels — part of the feminine atmosphere, which must be taken as a whole and paid for. Dick always felt at a disadvantage here, as might a kind of gentleman milliner to whom Lord Brasted was polite. He knew perfectly well that, as a priest, he was regarded with contempt, as being not quite a real man. The little triangle of purple silk he wore now beneath his collar became very nearly for him a badge of shame when Lord Brasted, a month before, had asked him, in the presence of other people, what it denoted. Dick resented all this unspeakably. He had a violent desire, upon which he had mused with pleasure, to take this virile nobleman by the scruff of the neck and cram him — say — into a Carthusian cell for a month, to let him see for himself whether the Catholic religion were no more than an elegant accomplishment.

And here was Lady Brasted, spiritually trickling on about priests and marble altars and sermons and architecture.

It was a full half-hour before he could get away. *He had* determined not to move before Algy, and

until the young man stood up suddenly, he sat and endured it and was polite.

He let Algy get out of the room, and then instantly turned to Lady Brasted.

"I must be going, too," he said. "Yes, he is a delightful boy."

"I am so glad you could come," cried Lady Brasted. "You know I think it so important. Of course, all souls are equal, and all that. I think that so true; but, you know, dear Algy is the eldest son now; and that is so important, so full of responsibility."

"Yes, exactly," interrupted Dick. "Good-bye, Lady Brasted."

And he turned and almost ran from the room.

Lady Brasted sat still a moment, smiling sweetly to herself. Then she gave a little murmur, and formulated, almost in words, the impression that Dick's visit had helped to emphasize.

"What a pity it is that priests are so unperceptive."

Then she looked at the clock, and decided that it was time to say her rosary. She had at least tried to be helpful.

(II)

Dick, bursting out of the front door as if discharged from a spring, saw a figure in a black coat and gray trousers rapidly making off round the curve of the Crescent. He saw instantly that the poor boy was simply trying to get away. But he had no mercy. He ran, and before Algy crossed the road, called him so loudly that the other really could do nothing but turn round.

Dick was a trifle cross. A small boy had shouted derisive encouragement at the sight of a stout clergyman, running, with a purple necktie, and a fox-terrier had barked at him so suddenly from behind some area bars that he had shied like a horse, and a prickly perspiration had burst out all over him with the shock. So his first remark was inconsiderate.

"That beast!" he said. "I can't bear her. I wanted to tell you I was sorry."

Algy looked so politely astonished that he perceived his remark had been a little unpriestly, if not actually unchristian.

"No — she's a good sort, really. But she's so infernally meddling."

"She's very zealous, isn't she," said Algy, smiling sarcastically with his nose in the air.

"*That's* just it. All these converts are. Look

here, walk with me as far as my house. I want to talk to you. I swear I won't ask you to come to Farm Street."

Algy smiled with one side of his mouth.

"I never want to hear another word about the Catholic Church as long as I live," he observed presently.

"My dear fellow, I know exactly what you mean," said Dick comfortably. "I always want to do outrageous things myself after seeing that woman. When she talks about religion she's intolerable; and when she doesn't she's . . . she's insupportable. . . . (Take care of that cab.)"

They dived down a side-street where they could talk more freely, and began again.

"Why didn't you want me to say where we had met before?" asked Algy.

Dick hesitated a moment; but after all it was public property.

"Well, to be plain with you, Chris and Lady Brasted had an affair once — ages ago. They were engaged, you know."

"*What?*"

"Yes; indeed they were. Then she threw him over."

"Why?"

"Oh — you know — well — Chris was rather a bad hat at one time; and it came out."

Algy pondered this in silence.

"You didn't know?"

Algy shook his head.

"What an ass she must be," he said.

"Yes, certainly; but a good ass, you know."

"But — but that's so ghastly about Catholics, you know," burst out Algy explosively. "Either they're like that woman — or else —"

"Yes?"

"Or else those frightful Carthusians."

Dick took his arm firmly.

"My dear man; I'm glad you've said that. Now I take back my promise. I'm going to have an explanation."

"Explanation? What about?"

"Look here," said Dick firmly, "I'm going to insult you. You mustn't hit me, you know, *suadente diabolo* — that's excommunication."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Oh! well, never mind. Now then, are you ready?"

"Well?" (Algy's voice sounded rather breathless.)

"Do you know I'm pretty sure you're in bad faith — insincere — there!"

Algy's mouth opened.

"No," continued Dick. "Just hear me out.

I want to know what made you turn round all of a sudden at Parkminster."

A sort of spasm of indignation shook Algy; but Dick gave him no chance.

"Listen," he said. "I'm not at all clever — I know that well enough — but there are one or two things I have learnt in my life, and one of them is that there's nothing commoner than for people to try to kill their own conscience. Now if you can tell me honestly that you weren't trying to do that as we came out from Parkminster, I'll beg your pardon humbly and sincerely. I always take people's word. It's the only way. No . . . please wait till we reach the next turning."

He released Algy's arm as he spoke, and together in silence they passed down the broad pavement. It was one of those West End streets that consist chiefly of mews and cobbled interruptions to the traveler's footsteps, and at this hour all was peace. A cat or two sat in the westering sunlight here and there, but there was no human being in sight, except where, straight in front, passed and repassed in golden dust the carriages and motors on their way back from the park.

Once Algy began a sentence.

"Please —" said Dick; and there was silence again.

At about five paces from the corner Dick spoke once more, halting a moment.

"Look here," he said, "I want to say this, too. I'm not going to argue about the Contemplative Life. I know nothing whatever about it. But I take it that both you and I know quite enough about it not to argue. Of course, if you choose to hide yourself behind the man in the street and say that nobody's got any business to shut themselves up, and all the rest of that sort of cant — well, I'm silenced. Do you see?"

He moved on again, and the two passed out from the lane into the thoroughfare.

Dick said nothing, nor did Algy, and in silence they passed up the pavement, threading their way, now separated, now together. Dick was very strangely moved, he told me afterwards. When he had run after Algy ten minutes ago he had had not the slightest intention of re-opening this old subject; and now, in spite of the extraordinary incongruousness of talking to a well-dressed young man about his conscience in a walk through London streets, he had found himself plunged into this oddly intimate conversation. He had issued such a challenge as needs usually the most delicately appropriate circumstances. They crossed another street, turned again to the right and passed along. Algy following, it seemed, by a merely mechanical move-

ment of his legs. Dick was in a flurry of indecision, though he showed no signs of it. That is one of the few advantages in being really stout. They were coming very near his lodgings now, and Algy had not spoken. Once or twice the question rose again to the priest's lips, and each time it expired in silence. Then, for the last time, they turned a corner, passed along an empty pavement and halted before three steps that led up between railings to a house-door.

Dick stopped and faced the other. He noticed that his face was remarkably obstinate and yet that he seemed distressed.

"I live here," he said. "Would you care to come in for five minutes?"

Dick's old servant, Betty, who kept house for him, poked her head round the corner of the stairs ten seconds later, and observed her master, followed by a young man, come into the hall and go upstairs without speaking. She was very old now and panted a good deal in this weather, so she thought she would wait to see if a bell rang for tea. Perhaps Master Dick had had tea. But she went downstairs again and put the kettle on, to make certain.

Time went on, and six o'clock struck, and at that her resolution steadied itself. She lifted the kettle off and started upstairs. When she reached the

first floor she hesitated, listening with her old head on one side for nothing in particular. But there was no sound; and she tapped. Then she tapped again. Then she opened the door gently and looked in.

Her master was standing on the hearthrug with his hands behind him. The young gentleman was standing by the window looking out. Both turned at the sound, and looked at her in a curiously expectant way.

"Tea, Master Dick?" she said.

He shook his head; and she went out again.

(III)

Dick let Algy out that evening a little after seven o'clock. Then he went back to his room, sat down in his easy-chair and remained perfectly still.

After a quarter of an hour he got up, opened his engagement-book, and wrote down on the Tuesdays and Fridays for the following fortnight the entry "A. B. 6-7." Then he went to his shelves and selected three or four books which he placed on the table. He sat down, turning the pages of these, and at last made them into a parcel, tied them up, and addressed them to A. Banister, Esq. at an address in Prince's Gate.

Then again he sat still for a long time, twisting a *paper-knife* in his fingers.

Then he suddenly seized notepaper from in front and wrote me the following letter, which I copy from as I write.

"My Dear Father,

"I have seen Algy Banister again, and he gives me leave to tell you everything. I met him by an extraordinary chance this afternoon at the invitation of Annie Brasted — of all people in the world! She had caught him somehow, and sent for me to talk to him — you know her way.

"Well, it has all turned out in a most astonishing manner, and I may as well tell you at once that it has ended by his promising to come to me for instructions during this next fortnight while he is in town. And now for his history.

"My dear man, he's been through, literally, a *hell* of time. That exclamation of his at coming out from Parkminster was simple Bad Faith. By an extraordinary stroke of luck, which I can't explain at all except by Divine Providence, I happened to spot that and, by still more extraordinary luck, happened to say so — outright — in Prince's Mews. I gave him fifty yards to answer in — to make up his mind whether he was going to be or not. He held his tongue. He said nothing at all till we reached my house. Then I asked him if he was coming in. My dear man, he had about three seconds' evident

CIRCULATING DEPARTMENT

conflict. Then he came in and told me the truth from beginning to end.

"Well; apparently he's been a Catholic at least since Christmas. But he's simply funked it. I don't blame him. He'll have a frightful time of it at home, I expect. The Parkminster business gave him his first real dig. Of course, he knows nothing whatever really about the Church, except that it's the Church — *la foi du charbonnier.*— And the next question is the Vocation.

"Now I know nothing about Vocations. My own gives me enough to do. But I know this much, that it's simple madness for him to attempt Parkminster. They wouldn't look at him, of course. Besides, he can't possibly know his own mind, and, to tell the truth, he's humble enough to see that.

"No, he's going to tell his people when he goes home at the end of next week; and we're going to make arrangements for his reception after that. And, as regards all future matters, that's going to be left for the present.

"Well; I thought you'd like to know this. Pray for us. He'll want it, and I always do, as you know.

"Ever yours,
"R. YOLLAND."

"*P.S.*— I'm just going to send a line to Chris.

Annie Brasted, of course, will think that she's more of a ministering angel than ever."

Of course this letter took me completely by surprise, and, of course equally, after five minutes I was telling myself that I had known it all along. As a matter of fact it was, of course, the only possible explanation. Algy had kept away with extraordinary care, and I ought to have understood why; but, like a blind idiot, I had really thought his ferocity after Parkminster to be genuine conventionality.

I sat down and wrote him a long letter. Then I tore it all up, and wrote him a short one.

After a week I received this answer —

"DEAR FATHER BENSON,

"Thanks very much for your congratulations. I haven't told my people yet, but I'm going to, at the end of the week. I shall hope to be received in August or September.

"Now I want to tell you this, and I hope you won't be disappointed. It is that I feel pretty sure now that I haven't any sort of Vocation for Religion. I've been talking a great deal to Monsignor Yolland, and I really do think that my duty is to stop at home. I don't expect I shall enjoy it particularly, but I can always go round the world or

something. Besides, really I'm rather frightened of Parkminster. It's awful, you know. Of course, it's very splendid and all that, but I'm sure it's not for me. I really could not stand it. I'm not big enough. And my people would be perfectly wild. It'll be bad enough my becoming a Catholic, but this would finish them altogether. I am sure I must just stop at home, and I expect you'll agree with me.

"Thanks so much for everything you've done for me. I'm using the 'Penny Catechism' you gave me at Cambridge.

"I wonder if you'd come down to Crowston for a day or two later on, if my people can stand it. I don't mean yet, but next winter, perhaps, when they've had time to settle down. I wish you would. And I want Mr. Dell to come too.

"I must stop.

"Ever yours sincerely,
"ALGERNON BANISTER."

I put the letter down; and I said three words —
"Poor dear man!"

CHAPTER V

(1)

HAROLD BANISTER strolled out on to the lawn with his hands in his pockets, passing on the garden-steps the footman who was carrying back to the house the remnants of the twelve o'clock post. The remnants consisted of two letters directed to Harold Banister, Esq., in a clerkly hand, in envelopes bearing the Oxford postmark, with suspiciously rounded flaps. Harold put them in his pocket, and passed on under the cedar. There he found his mother as he had expected. She woke up from a letter.

"Algy's coming by the six forty-nine," she said with an air of vague discomfort. "He says he's got something to tell us."

"Oh," said Harold.

He sat down and crossed his legs.

"I say, mother, can I have the motor to take me over to the Farquharsons?"

She looked at him still vaguely *distraite*.

"Oh, yes," she said. "I suppose so. I wonder what the boy means."

"Bother Algy! And may it wait for me?"

She started.

"The motor? Oh, yes, if your father doesn't want it. But you'll have to stop at the station to pick up Algy."

Harold grinned.

(There was some lawn tennis at the Farquharsons, eight miles off. Sybil had remarked in a postscript of a formal little note she had written to him that she would be there.)

"Six forty-nine did you say?"

"Yes — six forty-nine," murmured Mrs. Banister, gathering up her envelopes and departing.

Harold sat on, and after registering a resolution that seven o'clock would be in plenty of time, began to think about Sybil.

The situation had been strangely shifted by Theo's death. It was as when diamonds become trumps in the ingenious game of Jacoby. An unimportant personage, while remaining personally unimportant, had become officially significant, and it was difficult to know under which aspect to deal with him. Algy was as unsuited as ever to his environment, as slightly out of tune, yet he was the heir, and his attitude towards things now mattered. For example, in disposing of a certain outlying *wood belonging* to Crowston estate Mr. Banister

had thought it necessary to mention the affair to Algy; the bearing of the servants had undergone a minute but perfectly perceptible change; a groom had once hesitated for a fraction of a second at receiving an order from Harold to saddle a certain much-coveted mare, and all this kind of thing had been unheard of a year before.

Harold acquiesced well enough. Indeed, there was nothing else to do. In fact, he himself had begun to treat Algy with just the faintest suspicion of respect. But there were times when he resented it.

His own affairs were not brilliantly flourishing. His relations with Sybil were as satisfactory as ever, but not more so; nor were there any particular prospects of their becoming so. Further, he had played the fool rather at Oxford, and was exactly two hundred pounds poorer than he ought to have been, as his father had bitterly pointed out. And now there were two more bills.

He drew them out of his pocket.

Yes, they were polite enough, for he was still a freshman, but nineteen pounds seven shillings and threepence at a livery stable, and twenty-three pounds eleven shillings and fourpence at a wine merchant and tobacconist, amount to forty-two pounds eighteen shillings and seven pence (at least, I think so). He tore them carefully into minute

pieces, inserted them into an envelope and crumpled the whole into a tight ball, which he replaced in his pocket. Then he began to review the situation with the help of a cigarette.

First of all there was himself.

Harold was perfectly charming, but he did not possess the virtue of being able to look at things from any standpoint except his own. He was geocentrical. He was, as it were, the earth, and Sybil the moon; his parents were the larger stars, and Algy a kind of comet that approached rapidly through space. He had not yet found a Personage important enough to be represented by the sun. The comet was the important thing, and he did not quite know what its advent portended. For Algy had begun to bewilder him.

There had been the affair with Mary Maple last year, which had had such a surprising termination. Harold was no fool, and he had understood the position, but what he did not at all understand was why, when the coast was obviously cleared by Theo's death, Algy had seemed to take the alarm. They still saw a good deal of Mary, in fact, she was in the house now, but she had become subdued and rather more femininely feminine.

Now if Algy had advanced towards Mary, the situation would have been more intelligible; it was but

proper that the eldest son should at least show signs of matrimony; but it was irritating that Harold himself should have this desire with no means of gratifying it and that Algy, with all the means, should have none of the desire. He felt a vague resentment at the thought.

He had written to his father once from Oxford, in a burst of confidence, signifying that he would like to know, even in the most general terms, what his own prospects were to be; but Mr. Banister's letter, written immediately after the reception of one from Harold's tutor, had not been reassuring; he had told him that his business was to read his books at Oxford, keep within his allowance and not to be a young fool. And Harold could not but grant that there was justice in these remarks.

He was just finishing his cigarette, when Mary came out, and he watched her come down the steps, very upright and dignified, in a large straw hat. He quite liked Mary. She was always pleasant and deferential. She appeared and disappeared at the proper feminine times. She occasionally asked him to do small jobs for her which flattered his pride, such as giving an opinion upon her bicycle and recommending treatment for an invalid dog she had at home. And she never attempted the faintest familiarity in referring to Miss Sybil Markham.

"Algy's coming down by the six forty-nine," an-

nounced Harold as she stood looking down at him. "It's a beastly bore."

Her eyelids fluttered with discreet amusement.

"How most brotherly!" she said.

Harold laughed pleasantly.

"Well, he is rather an old lump, isn't he," he cried. "But I didn't mean that. I meant that I've got to call for him in the motor."

"I hope you'll be punctual," she said, sitting down and taking off her hat.

"Oh, seven o'clock'll do for Algy. Train's sure to be late. Have a cigarette?"

Mary's eyes stole softly to right and left, for she knew this house to be a trifle old-fashioned.

"No gardeners about?" she observed.

"Blow the gardeners," said Harold, and held out his case.

She took one, and held out her hand for his. Harold gave it, and with a pleasant sense of intimacy watched her hold the glowing end to the end of the other and her long-lashed downcast eyes and her pursed mouth and her coils of shining hair. (What a fool Algy was! She would have done so well!)

"I say; I'm going to the Farquharsons."

"Yes?" said Mary, breathing out fragrant smoke.

"Sybil's to be there. Shall I give her your *love?*"

"Do," said Mary, without the faintest sign of consciousness. "I do like that girl."

"So do I," said Harold earnestly, watching her. But Mary smoked on without a tremor.

"She's just like a Gainsborough," she observed presently. "And will go on looking more and more like a French marquise every year she lives."

Harold's soul was filled with delight. It was a precious consolation to him to talk like this without personal matters being even hinted at. In the depths of his heart he recognized the tact, but it was not obtrusive enough to annoy him. He positively loved Mary at this moment.

And she talked on for a few minutes with sublime discretion, saying a little more about Sybil, and then about the horse she would ride this afternoon, and then about this and that and the other, and then back to Sybil again. It was perfectly done. There was no significant insistence upon Sybil, yet she was there, underneath all the time, and emerged again at the proper moment for Harold's consolation. Then, at last, when the boy, sadly remembering that he must see about the motor, left her and went in, a very subtle change passed over her face. She let the cigarette burn itself out unheeded, and sat looking before her at the hot air above the flower beds.

(II)

When Harold, rather cross, drew up at five minutes past seven at the station, he was informed that Mr. Algernon had walked on, leaving his luggage to be picked up. Five minutes later he caught sight of him ahead, walking strenuously, up a little slope between woods, his straw hat in his hand.

The two brothers greeted one another unemotionally, Algy climbed in, sat down, fanning himself, and they moved on.

Algy seemed rather constrained, thought the boy. He made short, deliberate answers and looked steadily ahead. Finally Harold put his inquisitiveness into words:

"I say, what have you got to tell mother?"

Algy's mouth twitched slightly; he stared straight ahead of him.

"You'll hear this evening," he said abruptly.

Harold subsided with indignation. Then after a pause Algy went on, with a faintly defiant air.

"Look here, Harold. I can't tell you now, because it isn't fair. You'll know this evening. Remember I shan't mind what side you take."

"That's most satisfactory," remarked the other with fierce irony. "And so jolly explicit."

Algy made no answer, and they turned into the lodge gates in silence.

But Harold had an idea, and his brain worked upon it busily. It was plain that it was something important, that it concerned the family and that the family would consider it unsatisfactory. So much was plain; and his mind therefore instantly leaped to a conclusion.

By the swan-pond he put it into words.

"How old is she?" he said coolly.

Algy turned with such abruptness and with so much amazed a face that for an instant Harold thought himself on the right tack. Then the other laughed frankly.

"Rather under nineteen hundred years," he said.

"Funny airs," murmured Harold vindictively, thinking himself mocked.

As the house came into sight from the top of the rise, Algy drew a long breath and leaned forward, pressing his hands between his knees, and there was in his bearing such an apprehensiveness that once more Harold thought he had made a right guess. It was perhaps a barmaid, but more likely an actress or a milliner. Beyond such a catastrophe as this his mind did not soar. And the estate was entailed, and Algy was of full age, and nothing could be done. Well, well; his father perhaps could not do much, but at least he could say a good deal and with a kind of childish zest Harold chuckled intensely.

He at least would not be the only disgrace to the family. He would seem even virtuous by contrast.

Mrs. Banister was positively waiting in the hall when they arrived, and her mild eyes seemed discontented.

"Well, my son?" she said, as she kissed Algy.

"After dinner," he said.

But she hung about him as he put by his hat and stick and stood rather indecisively as he passed towards the inner door.

"It's all right, mother," smiled Algy, "At least —"

She turned to Harold.

"What is it? Did he tell you?"

Harold shook his head, and Mrs. Banister, after a weak effort to appear unconcerned, walked off towards her room.

Algy was far more frightened than he had anticipated. Somehow the sight of the house, its solidity, its uncompromising Britishness, the opulent and respectable park, the immovability of the air of the hall with its portraits and its crossed pikes — all combined to make him realize more than ever the appalling bomb he was presently to explode. That a Banister should become a Papist! It was unthinkable. And down there, half a mile away, was the *little* Norman church, undoubtedly Papist in its

origin, yet undoubtedly now Protestant in every stone, in every smell, with all the mild and benevolent machinery of the parish, with its "room," its Christmas concerts, its unostentatious relief, its Mr. Mortimer and its whiskered Vicar. And all formed a picture, more than a picture, a living tableau, a scheme of life, in which Papistry would be as much out of place as a tragedy-queen in a mothers' meeting.

And the worst of it was that Algy was entirely convinced.

He went straight to his room, sat down on the window seat and began to stare at the grass slope up which the drive went. He felt he simply could not face his mother. It would be on false pretenses. He had run from her just now under the spur of that instinct.

For the fiftieth time he began to wonder how exactly they would take it. He did not for a moment believe that his father would storm like a theatrical parent, nor that he would amicably consent, nor that he would burst into pathetic sobs, and Algy's imagination did not suggest to him any other methods of receiving such a shock. It was, in fact, unthinkable. There was no precedent. It was as if this blameless though passionate Justice of the Peace were faced by such a problem as, let us say,

the Judgment of Paris; or as if he were required at a moment's notice to pronounce a discourse upon Tintoretto's art.

As to his mother, he was hardly more adequate to judge. Neither tears nor fury would be in the least possible, still less was acquiescence. Then what —

At this moment he saw from his window Mary Maple suddenly turn the corner of the shrubbery and advance up the gravel sweep, and at the sight a dim hope dawned upon him. He would make his confession publicly, in the drawing-room. Mary's presence would at least help to make the atmosphere equable. Nothing very outrageous could happen if she were there.

But was it fair? He hesitated. Yes, it was perfectly fair. She would be a help, not a hindrance, all round. She was sufficiently at home here to be treated in this way. After all, he was doing the courageous thing in making the announcement at all by word of mouth. He was fully justified in taking advantage of what cover he found at hand.

Then once more terror seized upon him, and he sat motionless, in no conflict, since his determination was established, yet none the less beaten upon by fears and images, staring out at the garden grass slopes, as the man opened and shut drawers behind him in the somber room.

When the hot water had been set ready and the

door closed, he went across and turned the key. Then, after an instant's hesitation, he went upon his knees at his bed-side, and buried his head among his dress-clothes.

(III)

Mr. Banister sat in suggestive silence after the ladies had gone that evening, glancing up uneasily under his bushy eyebrows at his son and heir opposite. He thought it would be kind to give the boy an opportunity of breaking the news first to his father. But Algy made no sign. He seemed a little white. His hand, Harold noticed, shook ever so slightly as he took a cigarette and lighted it at a candle.

When the coffee had gone out the old man made an attempt.

"You have something to tell us, my boy, haven't you?"

Algy swallowed in his throat.

"Yes," he said.

"Nothing. Nothing you would like to tell me first, eh?"

"I'd sooner tell it in the drawing-room," said Algy desperately.

"What! Before Miss Maple?"

"I. . . . I think so."

It gave great relief to the old man to hear his son

say that. He too had had vague forebodings of some matrimonial tangle, or of something even less reputable. Not that Algy was not steady; he had never had a word to say against that; but, well . . . one never knew. However, that was settled, and Mr. Banister drew upon his cigarette with more confidence. A new theory, which had suggested itself secondarily before, now rose clear above the horizon. It was sure to be some wild scheme. Shooting big game or something. Well, that was nothing very serious. Perhaps even it concerned the North Pole, or a flying machine, and here Mr. Banister's imagination drooped its weary wings.

When his cigarette was but half consumed, he dropped it into his finger-glass and placed his hands on the table in the attitude of a frog.

"Well," he said, "shall we —"

Years afterwards Algy remembered the exact appearance of the drawing-room as he followed his father into it.

It was a long room, and they entered it at the end. On the right stood a rose-wood table with a lamp upon it. On the left were three windows, and at the further end, on either side of the great mirror were two more, and all were open to the soft summer air and light that faded every instant. In the *corner* opposite glimmered a white swan-screen.

Another table stood beyond the fire-place in the diagonally opposite corner, and before it was drawn up a sofa, upon which sat the two women, with their backs to the second lamp; and these both looked up with a strangely expectant air as the men came in. There were a few easy chairs here and there, and a dozen little gilded ront-chairs upon the stained boards.

His father went straight across to the high white mantelpiece and faced about, instinctively gathering his coat-tails beneath him. Harold sat down instantly behind the rose-wood table, and Algy, advancing to the edge of the big Persian hearth-rug, stopped, gripping the back of a ront-chair in his damp hand. He determined to speak standing. He now faced his parents and Mary, a couple of yards away from them.

"Now, then, my boy," said his father genially. "Algy's got an announcement to make, Miss Maple. . . . No, don't move."

Now, Dick Yolland had strongly advised the communication to be made first by letter; but I think I understand why Algy preferred not, and indeed his reasons (though I do not agree with them) for doing it in this very theatrical manner. He was terrified, and he wished not to yield to terror in the smallest degree.

But in this instant he had a violent reaction. It seemed to him, when faced by actuality, to be almost indecent to announce a change of religious conviction in a drawing-room after dinner. He jerked the chair back and sat down.

"Now then, my boy," said his father again, looking at him curiously.

No, said Algy to himself; he had begun and he would go through with it. He licked his lips, glanced at his mother, who was looking at him, and at Mary, who dropped her eyes instantly.

"It . . . it . . . I'm afraid you won't like it, father."

"Come, come, my boy; let's have it," said the old man sharply.

Algy drew a long breath, to steady his heart that, like a working machine, pulsated and shook him to his finger tips.

"It is this," he said. "I . . . I'm going to become a Roman Catholic."

The instant he had said the words, he perceived how they had gone home. They were as a bullet forced into the body of a man, producing a violent shock, but no sensation. He perceived how the three whom he could see were, for two or three seconds, reduced to a state of petrifaction. His father's coat-tails sank from his relaxed hands. His

mother remained poised, one hand a little upraised. Mary stared straight at him, with her hands in her lap. From Harold behind came no sound.

The tension grew tighter yet. To Algy himself it was as a string stretched to breaking, and the pause seemed interminable. Then some sound came from his mother's lips, and she dropped her hand. At the sound and movement, the old man jerked back into consciousness, and Algy intuitively turned to face him.

"Come, come, my boy. . . ." And the voice checked as if some cord snapped under a strain.

"I'm very sorry," said Algy. "I was afraid you wouldn't like it . . . but you see . . ."

Then he went off in a broken torrent of explanation. He could hardly tell me what he said; he hardly knew. He chattered of his conscience, his convictions, his belief that it was better to be straightforward. He had not yet been received. He had, of course, told his parents first, but nothing could change him; he had waited six months; he had read both sides. He was conscious of nobody but himself pumping out his justification.

Then across this broke his father's voice again, sharp and irritated:

"Don't talk nonsense, sir. . . ."

Algy brought his trembling lips together, staring at the ruddy face all pale and ashen.

"I — I was prepared for that. It's not nonsense. I'm very sorry, father. . . ."

The twitching face turned from side to side, to the women and back to the boy. Then the man took a step forward, hesitated, and then went swiftly past Algy towards the door by which they had entered. At the threshold he stopped, and a sharp sentence was rapped out by the shaking voice:

"Come with me, sir."

Algy rose, swaying a little, turned and went out after his father, seeing Harold's face look at him from the rose-wood table; he passed out, across the ante-room and into the room called the "library." It was here that he had been flogged as a child. He half wondered in that bewilderment whether he was to be flogged again now.

When he had shut the door behind him he stood hesitating. His father, in the shadow cast by the shaded lamp, went straight across to the fire-place and threw himself into a chair. Then he beckoned to Algy and pointed to a chair opposite. Algy sat down and gripped the arms.

"Now then," said the trembling voice, struggling to be kind, "tell me all about it, my boy."

Algy drew a long breath and began.

I do not propose to describe what he said. But *he told me* afterwards that he had been greatly re-

assured by his father's tone and, further, that while speaking he regained his self-possession. He mentioned no names except Dick Yolland's who had instructed him. I was "a priest at Cambridge," Chris was "a man I know." Briefly he told his story, he recounted a few elementary arguments, he announced his certainty and then he sat back once more.

There was complete silence for a minute. Then his father cleared his throat.

"I see what it is, my boy. You've been taken in by these fellows. They're always after eldest sons and all that, you know. This Yolland; he's a Jesuit, I suppose?"

"No, he isn't," said Algy.

"Ah! I expect he is really. They all are, you know. And, of course, they're as clever as the devil. And those other fellows?"

"They're converts. They were once Protestants, too."

"Ah! there's some shady story, depend upon it. Well, now, my boy, of course all this is just stuff and nonsense. All sensible men know that well enough. This Yolland — who is he?"

"He's a priest. He was an old Winchester boy. He's always been a Catholic."

"Ah! Well, we mustn't blame him. He was brought up in it, you know. They can't see any

better, you know. Well, now, my boy, you must see the Vicar and have a talk with him. We'll soon knock the bottom out of all this — eh, my boy?"

"I'll see the Vicar certainly, if you want me to."

"That's right; that's right. I was sure you'd see reason. This kind of thing isn't much in my way, you know. Of course I'm a Protestant and all that; and what's good enough for your father and mother is good enough for you, isn't it, my boy?"

"It . . . it isn't that, father; it's . . ."

"Yes, yes, I know, the young generation and all that. But, you know, there are some things we can't stand. Well, well, I'll ask the Vicar to step up to-morrow. Algy, my boy, you won't say anything to your brother, will you?"

"I must answer him if he asks me questions."

"Yes, yes; but you won't try to make him a Papist, will you?"

"I must answer his questions," repeated Algy steadily.

"Well, well — that'll be all right. See here, my boy, I don't know how your mother'll be taking this. I'll just go back and tell her you're behaving like a sensible fellow. We'll soon get all this straight. We mustn't upset her, you know."

The old man stood up, and Algy rose with him. *Even in* this half light the boy could see that his

father was gravely perturbed, yet struggling to retain self-possession, and in a moment the horrible pathos pierced his heart. Algy knew well enough what the end would be, that the Vicar would be useless and that these attempts on his father's part to glaze over the situation were worse than useless. This violent attempt at kindness was worse than all conceivable fury. He knew perfectly well that anger and bewilderment were dominant below that trembling geniality and that it was only by the fiercest efforts that they were restrained, and the knowledge of that bewilderment was as a sword of poignancy.

Here, too, was the room where the floggings took place — a room with austere bookshelves, closed by brass gratings never opened, a room furnished with old leather chairs, a couple of kneehold tables never used and a Turkey carpet. It was just his father to him, a kindly man, honest, sincere, impervious to argument, bound fast in sentiment and convention, convinced that his system of life and thought rested upon irrefutable logic. And this man was his father whom he loved, who had always been good to him, and he had wounded him and would wound him again far more fiercely.

Algy gave one sob.

His father patted him on the shoulder.

"There, there, old boy. I knew you were a

sensible fellow . . . you must think of your mother and the rest of us . . . and . . . and Theo. . . . Good night, old boy; you'd better be off upstairs. I'll go and see your mother."

CHAPTER VI

(1)

IT is not my business to defend Algy's constancy, only to relate it. He was aware of a conviction that was immovable, a conviction against which arguments, which he could not answer, beat in vain. But this book is not a treatise on theology. The thing that hurt, however, was his father's kindness.

It was about a week later that Mr. Banister was made really aware of Algy's position. Harold, vaguely excited and gloriously contemptuous, was reading the "Daily Mail" in the hall an hour before lunch, when the Vicar came through from the garden. He was a genial man who hated trouble, with minute side-whiskers and a sunburnt face, and a trifle inclined to be stout. He paused as he saw the boy. Harold jumped up.

"Is your father in?" asked the clergyman abruptly.

"In the library."

Still he hesitated. Then he went quickly on through the swing-door of the ante-room, and Harold sped out into the garden to find Algy.

He read the signs correctly. For the third time that week Algy had drearily gone down to the Vicarage at his father's request to discuss theology. The two were at it half the morning. Then Algy had appeared at lunch silent and dispirited, eyed furtively by his father. But this was the first time that the Vicar had shown signs of agitation. There had been a brusque annoyance in his air that revealed volumes. Harold conjectured that Algy had issued an ultimatum at last.

Outside, the garden lay in the hot summer sunshine, full of sound and color; and beyond the cedar, up and down the terrace, paced a figure in brown holland and a Panama hat, leaving a trail of fragrant smoke behind him. Harold went straight across.

He was a good boy, and he was sincerely touched by the face of Algy. It was utterly and entirely miserable and rather peevish.

"Well, old man?" said Harold.

Algy's face twitched as he halted.

"Look here," he said, "have you come to jaw, or what?"

Harold passed his hand through his brother's arm.

"Look here," he said seriously; "of course I think you all wrong and all that. But I'm beastly sorry for you."

"I don't want your pity," snapped Algy, horribly aware that he was not behaving as a martyr should.

Harold drove down his resentment.

"I say, old man, you needn't be beastly with me. I swear I haven't come out to jaw." The truth was that he was consumed with curiosity, and he knew he could learn nothing if he snarled back.

"Tell me," he said, as Algy yielded, and the two began to walk down the terrace together; "I saw old Simkinson just now. What's he gone to see father about?"

"He's gone to tell him that I'm going to be a Catholic."

"I say! Really and truly?"

"Really and truly."

"But . . . but . . ."

"I'm sick of it," burst out Algy. "Of course, I can't answer all his beastly books. But he couldn't answer mine. And, after all, I know my own mind, I suppose."

Harold pondered this.

"But I can't make out why you're so keen. Why isn't the Church of England good enough?"

"Because it isn't."

"I can't make out why you want to change, for all that. It seems to me it doesn't much matter either way."

"My good chap, I happen to believe that it does

matter a good deal. Look here, Harold — Oh, Lord! what's the good?"

Algy had gone through extraordinary misery during the last week. That must be his excuse. For the first time in his life he had really plunged into controversy, and controversy tangled inextricably with personal questions. It was not that his people were not kind; the worst of it all was that they were so kind. They treated him with an indulgence he had never known. His father had behaved to him almost as to a man of his own age. His mother, after a feeble and pathetic remonstrance or two, treated him with astonishing attention. Harold had not once made himself offensive, and Mary had even gone so far as to write him a womanly little note of sympathy, which was delivered one morning with his early tea. He had begun to realize for the first time that he was really rather an important person and that he could not move a finger in the web in which he walked without interfering violently with other people's arrangements. And this was intolerable. He could have borne fury far more easily. He could have set his teeth and laid his ears back and waited for the storm to pass, but it was quite another matter to know that he was wounding instead of being wounded in the house of his friends.

There had been a dreadful little incident on Sunday. As usual he had gone to church with the others, but on coming out on this day, his parents had turned aside from the path to where a large, white marble monument presiding over a white marble border, represented that Theodore Banister, the beloved eldest son of John and Anna Banister, here slept in the Lord awaiting a glorious resurrection. There they had stood, the two old folk with bent necks, he bareheaded, in his frock-coat and gray trousers and white spats, and she in her purple bonnet and silk dress, for at least a minute, while the two sons stood, ill at ease, with Mary, three or four yards away. Then the two had returned, and the mother had looked at him once.

That appeal to Theo's memory was horrible to him. That Theo, of all persons in the world, should be thus mutely indicated as a beloved son, dying obediently in the faith of his fathers and the fear of God — it was dreadful, and it was inexpressibly ludicrous. It was a sentiment to which there was no answer, a blow delivered below the belt. And Theo of all people! Why it was the death of Theo that had first made conventional religion seem so wearisomely inadequate.

Algy had no high thoughts to sustain him. He did not in the least move to the sound of spiritual trumpets and the light of mystical vision. That was

all gone. He knew nothing except that he must be a Catholic and that if he recoiled it would be to the outrage of all he knew as certainly good and true.

But he could say nothing of this to anybody. He wrote one despairing letter to Dick and another to Chris. Dick answered by four pages of encouragement. Chris did not answer at all, and of the two he preferred the latter. Here, then, he was stuck, alone and hopeless, and he had just sent in his ultimatum to his father.

Harold remained a minute or two longer, trying to make conversation, seeking in a vague fashion to get inside the secret of this strange enchantment that had swept off his brother; but it was useless. Harold was incapable even of conceiving Algy's state of mind. To him religion was a department as remote as botany. There were the ceremonies and creeds. One performed the one and repeated the other, as a man might walk in a garden and say over the names of the flowers he knew; but all had nothing whatever to do with real life. Real life was doing a large number of interesting things, shooting small animals, performing social duties, eating, drinking, smoking, sleeping, reading the "Strand Magazine" and certain volumes of Badminton, making love to Sybil and behaving decently to his own family and other people that he liked.

If you had pressed him he would have said that certain things were "wrong," that there was some kind of reckoning probable after death and that he supposed Christianity was true. He could have no more changed his religion than he could have become a naturalized Portuguese.

He looked up once or twice towards the garden-steps, vaguely expecting to see his father appear, wrathful and denunciatory. But nothing happened.

"I say, old man, they're a long time at it. I wonder what's father saying?"

"Lord! How should I know?"

Harold sniffed reproachfully. He felt so virtuous himself that he could afford to keep his temper.

"I wonder what'll happen," he said, for the fourth time.

All about them lay the sweet summer, as serene as if there were no Faith at all to come down like a sword between father and son. The pigeons cooed in the high trees of the wood half a mile away, the butterflies danced and swerved above the flowers. Something of the serenity echoed in Harold's small soul, and he wondered again why people couldn't take things as they found them. Algy, on the other hand, was reflecting bitterly that if it had been a question of his losing all religion whatsoever there would not have been half this fuss.

The bell rang out from the turret for the servants' dinner, as they turned at the end of the terrace, and, as if at a signal, at the head of the garden-steps appeared Mr. Banister with the clergyman behind him.

The two brothers stopped dead.

"Look," said Harold softly, "he's beckoning."

The two men disappeared again within, as Algy dropped his brother's arm and went towards the house.

(II)

It was a family council, aided by the spiritual arm, in whose presence Algy found himself as he pushed open the half-open door of the library.

Standing at the fire-place, with one arm resting on the mantelpiece, facing the door, but with his eyes downcast, stood his father. His face was piteous to see.

It was the face of a Conventionalist in the grip of a problem. . . . His lips were tightened into a line of severity; his eyes, when he raised them for an instant as Algy came in, shot out a dozen emotions under his heavy brows — tenderness, indignation, appeal, resolve. Across the whole passed now and again an uncontrollable twitching, and, as Algy, his own heart sick and exhausted, went in silence to the seat set ready for him, he saw the thick, weather-

tanned hand of his father shaking violently as he fingered a small bronze stag that lay beneath them.

On the left sat his mother, her eyes, too, downcast and her lips trembling. Plainly she had lately collapsed, so far as she was capable of doing so. Her fingers were interlocked in her rather spacious lap. He saw she would not utter a word while sentence was given.

Behind Mr. Banister stood the clergyman. Algy caught one glimpse of his face, troubled and depressed. Then he fixed his eyes on his father.

"Where is Harold?" asked Mr. Banister in a deep voice.

Algy arose hastily, but he was beckoned down again, and the bell was rung. Then a pause followed, deadly and sickening, till a man came in.

"I wish to see Mr. Harold here immediately."

Again the closing of the door was followed by the same pregnant pause.

Algy strove to marshal his ideas. But it was impossible. He selected one and held on to it, with, so to speak, his ears back and his eyes shut, and his teeth and hands gripping. It was to the effect that he must not swerve in the slightest, nor give the faintest hint that delay would be of any use. He seemed to himself, on his weaker side, an unmitigated brute. It appeared to him, now and again, that Religion of all kinds was an intolerable, unnat-

ural nightmare, a horrible, insidious, corrupting thing that broke up families and sucked blood. Then again he set his teeth in his resolve and waited.

Harold appeared presently, very pale and bright-eyed, breathing quickly. He was motioned to a seat behind Algy, and the door was closed.

Then Mr. Banister left off fingering the stag, turned round full face, his hands locked behind his back, and began.

He delivered his little speech as from a public platform. Assaulted in his conventions he took refuge in them desperately.

"We are gathered here for a very painful duty, and we must not shrink from it. My eldest son told me a week ago that he intended leaving the religion of his mother and myself, and of the rest of his family for three hundred years, and joining himself to the Roman Catholics. I was quite stunned by that news — stunned, and, I need not say, terribly grieved. But I hoped it was just a fancy and that a little thought would put it right. But it seems that I was wrong. The Vicar here, who has very kindly talked to my son several times, and put before him the strongest possible reasons against such a terrible step, tells me now that his arguments have been of no use and that he cannot even get an *answer to* them. He tells me, further, that my son

declines to argue any more and announces his firm determination to persist and to be received into the Romanist body immediately. I will now ask my son if he corroborates this?"

Algy drew a long breath and licked his lips.

"Yes, father."

"You are quite determined?"

"Yes, father."

There was a pause. Algy dropped his eyes again, and fixed them upon the brass fender at his father's feet. He noticed a gleam of tarnish in one spot.

"Very good," said Mr. Banister, turning again slightly and beginning once more to finger the bronze stag. "Then I do not suppose that any arguments of mine will prevail. I will say no more on the point. But I must now announce the determination to which I have come, after consultation with my wife and the Vicar. I have no intention of making my son a martyr for his ideas. I know my religion, I hope, better than that. But I have to consider the rest of my family and the terrible effects that my son's presence here, as a professed Romanist, might have upon those for whom I am responsible. I cannot take it as a light matter, as some might. My . . . my religion is very dear to me. My wife and I were married in it, our parents on both sides for three hundred years have lived by it; my dear son Theo"—his voice

faltered, and for one horrible instant Algy feared there would be a collapse. But the old man was courageous and strong — "my dear son Theo died in it, only last year. I cannot therefore, conscientiously, allow my son, when once he has become a Romanist, to live here any longer. When I am dead, he will do as he pleases." (A spasm caught Algy by the throat. He seized his lower lip in his teeth, and by the acute pain saved himself.) . . . "I will leave that to his conscience. In the meanwhile I must ask him to live elsewhere, and for that purpose I shall place at his disposal a sum of two hundred and fifty pounds *per annum*. Should he come down here, or attempt to live here, after he has taken this step, I shall be compelled to withdraw that allowance. I wish it to be understood that in no sense do I cast him off. We shall meet no doubt in other places from time to time. I desire to keep up friendly relations with him, for I believe that he is more sinned against than sinning. Only, I cannot permit his being under the same roof as his mother and brother. He will understand, I am sure, what pain it gives to me. . . ."

Then the horrible thing happened. Conventionality fled and the old man collapsed, dropping his head upon his arm on the mantelpiece, and breaking out into loud, overpowering sobs.

At that sight and sound there came upon Algy, with a force that all this last week had been unable to effect, the temptation to throw all off and come back, to spring up and cry that all was a mistake and an illusion. Yet something, he recognized afterwards, held him in a grip he could not resist. He did not know what happened, but he found himself at his father's side, clutching the rough gray sleeve, crying out piteously. Behind him was a babble of voices, his mother's, the Vicar's.

Then he tore himself free, and ran out, miserably, blindly, not knowing where he ran.

(III)

Ten minutes later, he threw himself down in the bracken, at the same place where nearly a year before he had nursed his indignation and watched Harold and Sybil pass together to the garden-gate.

About him again lay the hot summer, here in green and fragrant gloom, punctuated by a million tiny flies, up there in cloudless blue. Beneath his hands, as he lay outstretched, was the cool moss and heather.

It was the familiar sound of the turret-bell, ringing to announce luncheon, that brought him back again to connected thought, and the first imagination that formulated itself plainly before him was

the sense that the whole affair was unreal and impossible. It was as it had been with him at Theo's death.

Here, about him, was normal life, the life of nature, beautiful, unconscious, and divine; there, it culminated in luncheon. And across this he had dragged ruthlessly a harrow of unreality, a series of linked thoughts and propositions that might very well mean nothing at all. To become a Catholic meant to readjust anything, to destroy many things, to break up orderly, normal, conventional life, to reject experience, to give intolerable pain to those to whom obviously, if duty meant anything, he owed love and tenderness. And the whole foundation of this extravagant and brutal action lay in his opinion that a series of thoughts and propositions were true.

Briefly, this was the conflict, and he regarded it for a long while. It was, as appeared afterwards, the last great fight in his experience, at least for the present, between what seemed and what was. On one side lay the whole of normal life, on the other that strange thing called the Supernatural. He perceived that to many people there comes no such conflict. The two things live together, like body and soul, in comparative harmony. But for him it was not so. He saw perfectly distinctly that for *him it* was a choice. He might, with the approval

of practically the whole of his world and with that, also, of a good deal of his own moral judgment, become a "sensible" boy again, go back to the house, sit down at luncheon, go with his father into the library afterwards and say that he had been hasty. Then, as he knew very well, the next step would be that the Vicar would be sent for once more and arguments retraced. He knew, perfectly well, that this time he would pay more attention to the arguments, that he would not be able to answer them and that, gradually, he would be convinced by them. So it would go on, for a week or so, perhaps a month, and at the close of it he would go to his father once more and tell him he had determined to take no step for the present . . . and, at that moment, he would have chosen finally for the rest of his life. In the future, whenever he felt uncomfortable, he would tell himself to be sensible, that he had been through the whole question carefully and that life was not long enough to re-open it. (Oh! Algy knew himself well.)

But, fortunately (at least from my point of view) he had always been honest with himself, and, after an hour or so, he saw absolutely clearly that his course of action would be nothing else than an outrage upon his conscience, upon that which he knew, though he could not explain why, he was bound morally to follow.

There, then, lay the two invitations: to be sensible, or to be conscientious. On one side lay all that I have described, in a word, Conventionalism. On the other side lay a strange thing, a Something that had risen over the horizon, at first a cloud no larger than a man's hand, yet charged with fire. It was an appalling thing to consider, this Supernatural. He began to see how madness lies that way, as it lies, too, in every passion, in human love and music and idealism, in fact, in everything that is not what is called normal, in everything as soon as it looms larger than other interests. He saw that while it is possible to envy those to whom comes no such overwhelming storm, yet these are only to be envied as every lower order of nature may be envied by that which is above. It was a question, he perceived, as to whether it was better to be normal and imperceptive and conventional, or to be abnormal and intuitive and passionate. The fire that kindles also burns. Thus, then, the Supernatural had come to him. On and up it had come, overcasting his sky, storming up over the edge of the world. There had been in it lightnings and voices and thunderings, the flash at Theo's death, the steady message — the appalling logic of the Catholic creed, the cold and piercing silence of the Carthusians, the sharp voice of Christopher Dell, the rapid talk of Dick Yolland — all

was as one here, and all was significant. He knew, with a certitude that I despair of making plain to those who have not experienced it, that this was all one, that it mingled into one clear and articulate Voice, pealing from heaven ringing in his soul.

Now when he really perceived this, his choice was taken. He was an honest boy; and, for a few moments, there followed peace. He lay there content, lying in the green shadow, passive, without pain or desire, knowing himself one, not only with that Vision that passes understanding, but with all that is made, with nature as with grace, with the flies that danced as well as with their Maker.

And then, suddenly, without warning and without mercy, the piercing Voice cried again, a fresh and insistent invitation that he had silenced once before; and, in an instant his peace was gone.

He sat up, rebellious and despairing, telling himself that God had no mercy, that such a sacrifice was intolerable, complaining furiously that he who was ready to give so much ought not to be asked to give all, demanding a little breathing space. The conflict was upon him again, on a higher circle now of that mountain of God on which all men stand according to their stature. He stood up; he clenched his hands; his eyes were bright with

pain and fear; he took a quick step or two, this way and that. Then again he flung himself on his back.

. . . . . .

It was late in the afternoon before he again sat up, and I think I should not have liked to see him then, for the conflict was not fought. He had avoided it, covering his retreat with a multitude of arguments, darkening his own outlook with the smoke of his words. He knew that it was so, though I do not think that he knew that he knew it.

Then he stood up, stretching himself slowly, and began very deliberately to step over among the ferns towards the glade beneath, externally self-controlled, internally troubled.

It was drawing on towards tea-time; the table would be out on the lawn by now. He must go and join them.

As regarded the first step, his mind was now established, and, in a sense, this decision was easier to maintain, since he was distracted by the second question. He would say little or nothing to-night, he would take his place as usual, he would answer any questions that were put to him and to-night, in the smoking-room, he would tell his father, simply and straightforwardly, that he must go on the next morning.

It was strange as he passed up the garden to see

the table there, the glimmer of linen and silver in the cool shade, the three or four figures gathered there. Again that sense of unreality came upon him — the sensation as if he were stepping out of some land of dreams back towards solid and experienced life. No doubt he was a little pale and strained-looking, yet he was outwardly quiet enough, hatless, with his hands in his jacket pockets and his brown shoes stepping among the flower-beds. Mary was there, he saw, and he noticed her say a word quickly to his mother. Harold was on a low chair to one side, busying himself with the muffin-dish. As Algy came, the sensation deepened; it was like some old home-coming from school, when this home was a palace of delight and school lay behind him like a sordid dream. He knew, too, that his mother would presently express anxiety as regards his loss of luncheon. Yet in his deepest consciousness he never wavered. He knew that henceforward he must take this life as the dream and his dreams as reality. He was concentrated utterly upon this, and determined. Yet, as at Theo's death, he knew that he must behave normally.

He sat down, without a word on his side or from the others, in a basket-chair.

"Muffins," he said, "when you have quite done with them."

PART III

CHAPTER I

ON the very last day of July Lady Brasted sat in her drawing-room writing. She had just come up from luncheon, where she had talked tactfully to her husband about their journey next day and had asked him intelligent questions about his new motor. On the way upstairs she had sighed and smiled sweetly at the thought of the dear, simple fellow, and the simple, dear fellow, that instant in his study, with hands trembling with annoyance, was lighting a large cigar in the hope of soothing his temper. But he had managed to control himself wonderfully.

Lady Brasted had another affair on hand, and once more she had summoned Monsignor Yolland, who had been so brilliant with Algy Banister, to deal with it. She had written a delicate note of congratulation to that priest, a week ago, on seeing the news in the "Tablet," and had coupled with it an earnest request to call upon her upon this Wed-

nesday, her last day in town, at half-past two o'clock. He was rather late already. She had not mentioned that at three the patient would arrive. That omission was part of her tactfulness.

She hastily closed the envelope and directed it, as she heard the bell ring. Then she sat down in a low chair, arranged her draperies, and took up a little book.

He came in as usual, looking like a big puppy; and after a murmur or two she began.

"Dear Monsignor, I must congratulate you upon Mr. Algy. You managed it so brilliantly. But then, you know, you priests do know human nature so much better than — And is the dear boy very happy indeed? I have just written to ask him to Esher for a week-end in November. Is he very happy indeed?"

"Oh! he's all right," murmured Dick with a roving eye.

"Really, you know, it's terrible to think of what converts have to suffer! Poor Mr. Banister, I am afraid, little knows —"

"Mr. Banister! Why, what have you heard?"

"Why, it is terrible. Surely Mr. Algy has told you? He has been turned out of house and home practically penniless; there was a dreadful scene. His father —"

"Lady Brasted, do let me tell you the facts. It

seems to me Mr. Banister has behaved rather well. He has given Algy quite a decent allowance."

"But. . . ."

"Indeed, it is so. It's quite true he won't have him home, at least for the present; it seems he's afraid of some younger brother or other. But he's got Algy an excellent place in the City, and, as I say, has given him a good allowance."

"But surely, turning him out of the house —!"

"I think we mustn't judge him hardly. You know, Mr. Banister is really rather a religious man according to his lights. It's been a frightful shock."

"Oh! well; but surely Mr. Algy must feel it terribly?"

"Certainly he doesn't like it. But I assure you he doesn't consider himself persecuted. Nor do I."

"The dear boy!" murmured Lady Brasted. "And what a support you must be to him!"

Dick blinked solemnly. He did not know what else to do.

"He's coming to Amplefield with me next week," he said feebly.

"Well, it's all very wonderful and beautiful," cooed Lady Brasted. "And to think that he's eldest son, and all that. . . . But there's another matter I wanted to consult you about too; you man-

aged the last so well. Have you ever heard of Miss Maple?"

"Eh?" said Dick, rather startled.

"I see you have. Well, you know, she's a dear friend of mine. I have known her, oh! — years and years. And she's almost become a kind of companion to Mrs. Banister. So it seems as if there was a Providence in it all. Well, Monsignor, I'm afraid she's very unhappy."

Dick eyed her.

"Very unhappy," she continued smoothly. "I think her mind's working. This step of Mr. Algy's caused her to think. Oh! I've often talked to her — carefully, of course."

"Well?"

"And there are other complications too. You've heard of Theo?"

"I have."

"Well, I needn't say any more. But I think Mr. Algy is mixed up in it now too."

"But what can I do?" murmured Dick in bewilderment.

"I thought you might just talk to her a little. About the Church. . . . I'm sure you understand."

"Lady Brasted, how can I, possibly? I've never seen her. How could I be supposed to know?"

"My dear Monsignor, you need know nothing. Nothing at all. You see, it would all be so very suitable and beautiful in all ways. And I am sure she is sincere. Just a few words."

"I can't possibly," burst out Dick.

"Surely, Monsignor, a little tactful conversation about the Church. That is absolutely all. Who knows what it might lead to?"

Dick pursed his lips. He hated all this unspeakably. It was not that he was not zealous; it was the extraordinary disingenuousness of his hostess that troubled him; and he hated to be managed. While Lady Brasted flowed on, in small, slippery sentences that told him far more than did the words which composed them, he was looking desperately for an escape. He saw quite well what was wanted. It was that Mary Maple should be allured into the Church and that Algy should be compelled to marry her. He was to do the first, and Lady Brasted the second. This was bad enough; but what complicated it far more was that he knew the state of Algy's feelings. And he knew, further, that in the boy's present mood he might be led only too easily in the direction Lady Brasted wanted. It would be a kind of escape from the conflict. During these few minutes he hated Lady Brasted with indescribable passion; he wanted to run amuck; to get up, to *tell her what* he thought, to smash her Italian pic-

tures and her Della Robbias into small fragments and stamp out of the house. But that would scarcely be priestly. A bell rang, and he did not notice it. He was listening to Lady Brasted's account of a letter Mrs. Banister had written to her on the subject of Algy's conversion. Then the door was opened.

"Miss Maple, my lady."

Dick had never seen her before; and he was almost too angry to see her now. But, on reflection afterwards, he remembered that he had been astonished at her youthfulness. There came forward into the room a very beautifully dressed young lady, in a white veil and big hat. She looked perfectly charming. She had very bright eyes and coils of brown gold hair. She carried herself with extreme grace and dignity. Then she was wrapped in Lady Brasted's arms, while Dick was considering how he could best get away.

Then the introductions were performed, and he took up his hat.

"I'm afraid I ought to be going, Lady Brasted."

"Why, you said you could give me an hour, Monsignor," cried that lady with large, innocent eyes. "And you've hardly been here ten minutes. Please sit down again. I particularly wanted you to meet Miss Maple."

Dick sat down again. What else could he do?

"I'm so glad you were able to come, Mary dear. It's our last day in town, you know. George and I leave for Scotland to-morrow. And I'm so glad Monsignor Yolland could just manage this afternoon too. He's very busy, I know. All our priests are."

Then began that flow of small ecclesiastical conversation that Dick knew by heart, and which yet was rather effective. Lady Brasted did manage somehow to convey an idea of the Catholic Church that seemed to impress and attract certain kinds of minds. She talked like a child wrapt in the serenity of a supernatural home. Priests were, without exception in her conversation, mysterious, holy, paternal persons, unfathomably learned, unutterably tender and attractively ascetic. Dick, too, was forced to assent now and again to undeniable truths which she uttered, and he did so in the tone of a sulky boy. He was the more sulky as he saw that Miss Maple was apparently interested in him. He caught her bright eyes once or twice dwelling on his patch of purple silk, on his rather large waistcoat and boots. More than that, there was unmistakable humor in her face which tended to melt him. He thought she understood the situation.

Insensibly his anger grew less, for he was a humane and impressionable man. One thing alone

kept up his stiffness, and that was the thought of Algy. Finally the talk turned upon him.

"Have you seen anything more of Mr. Algy, Mary?" asked Lady Brasted. "You know it was Monsignor Yolland who received him into the Church."

Mary turned to him rather quickly.

"Indeed, I did not know that."

Dick assented. (He was beginning to behave better.)

"I thought it so brave of dear Mr. Algy to face his father like that. You know he told him straightway, face to face."

"I was there," said Mary quietly.

"Why, of course you were, my dear. I had forgotten that. Tell us about it."

Mary dropped her eyes.

"He came into the drawing-room. Yes, he was very brave, though — though he looked such a boy. He said it straight out to us all. I wanted to go away, but they wouldn't let me."

"And how did they take it?"

Mary started.

"Oh! I scarcely noticed. Yes, of course I did. They were simply bewildered, I think. Then Mr. Banister took Mr. Algy away with him into the library. I went away a couple of days afterwards."

There was something in her tone, extraordinarily slight, which made the priest glance up at her rather sharply. He could not have put his impression into words at the time. But he began to attend rather more carefully.

"I have just written to ask dear Mr. Algy to come down to us at Esher, in November, for a week-end. I always make up my parties long beforehand, you know. I wonder whether you would come to meet him? And you too, Monsignor, if you can get away?"

"I shall be delighted," said Mary.

Dick said he wasn't sure. Might he leave it until later? And meantime he was thinking furiously.

Then Lady Brasted began in earnest. She began to talk about the Church again; then she moved on to Monsignor Yolland himself — his Church in Soho — she even mentioned the hours of the masses and the time for Benediction at which Monsignor always preached himself. Dick could preach no more than a cow, and he knew it. He wondered what on earth she was at. But she flowed on, contentedly enough. She hardly breathed Father Badminton's name, and Mary seemed to listen contentedly too, to Dick's astonishment. Finally, she positively said that she must find her way to Soho.

"I am away for a month," said Dick hurriedly, hardly knowing what he said.

"When you come back then," smiled Lady Brasted inexorably. "Shall you be at Amplefield?"

"Yes," said Dick; "my holiday begins on Monday."

Then he took up his hat hastily, made his farewells and fled to think it out.

In the street he formulated one sentence.

"The worst of that woman," he said to himself, "is that she's generally perfectly right."

Lady Brasted turned to her friend.

"A charming man, isn't he? I was sure you would like him."

"I like him very much," said Mary seriously, staring at the fire-place.

"I wanted you to see one of our old Catholic priests. His father was a convert, you know; but somehow Monsignor has quite got the air. And he isn't at all a clever man, as you can see — just a blunt, straightforward man, but so holy. He is doing a wonderful work among the foreigners in Soho."

Mary nodded. She seemed to be thinking very deeply.

"Now do go and hear him preach, my dear. You know we've often talked about those things.

And he's got a beautiful place, down near us at home. He's put his cousin in charge, but it belongs to him. . . . Mary, my dear, is anything the matter?"

Mary turned to her suddenly; and all the humor had left her face.

"Oh! I'm tired . . . tired," she cried; and then: "No, no; it's nothing."

"My dear," said Lady Brasted, "I understand perfectly. We will have a good talk some day."

Mary looked at her in silence.

"Oh! Annie," she said, "I wonder if you do."

CHAPTER II

(1)

IT was a serious business, and Dick hurried along with very little prelatical dignity and with a great deal of perturbation. It seemed to him that something must be done, and he had not an idea what.

First, there was Algy. That young man was unhappy, and there was a plot against him. He was certainly unhappy. There was none of that extraordinary buoyancy about him that there ought to have been. Dick had seen him a dozen times and saw plainly that he had not really got his confidence.

Secondly, there was Miss Maple, and, in spite of Lady Brasted's atmosphere, he had become interested in her. There was something rather pathetic about her, and he did not know what it was. She had not said much, nor had Lady Brasted, in so many words; but Lady Brasted had supplied a suggestive prelude in the few minutes before the other arrived, and Mary herself had had a curious air about her. She had not sulked as people usually

did under Lady Brasted's attentions. She had eyed Dick as if she were appraising him. She had had an odd tone in her voice once or twice.

However, Algy was his first business.

At the corner of Trafalgar Square he stopped and began to bite his nails. (It is a bad habit he has in moments of great anxiety.)

He reflected that there was one single ray of light in the situation, and that was that Algy was coming down to Amplefield in the following week. But this ray was at least discolored, if not obliterated, by Dick's consciousness that he had not an idea what he should say to him when he got him there.

The upshot was that he stepped into a telegraph office and sent two telegrams. One of them was addressed to me. I received it when I came in for tea. It ran as follows:

"Come Tuesday instead of Wednesday. Most important. Hope Chris there. Yolland."

Then he went on his way.

I, too, was a little uncomfortable about Algy; but, though it was not in the least to my credit, I happened to understand a little better than Dick what was the matter. But, on the other hand, I *knew nothing* about the Miss Maple incident.

However, when I read the wire, I guessed that it concerned that young man and, after making an arrangement or two, wired an acceptance.

It was not that I was at all afraid as to Algy's constancy in the Faith. About that I was supremely satisfied. But he had not given me his confidence any more than he had to Dick, and I knew that there must be something behind I did not quite know. I connected it, of course, with Algy's vocation. I had seen cases before where a life had been spoilt. . . . But it was no good thinking about it; and I put the thing away.

On the Tuesday morning I received an almost illegible postcard from Dick, with the Amplefield postmark, of which I gathered the tenor to be that I was to come down by the five-seventeen. Another sentence was entirely undecipherable. So until I stepped out at Marlesdon Junction at nineteen minutes past five, I was unaware that Chris was in the same train with me. There, however, I ran into him and Dick simultaneously.

Chris looked extremely well and cheerful in his gray flannel suit, with his pointed beard and his vivid black eyes.

"You ass!" cried Dick. "Do you mean to say you traveled separately?"

"My good man," I said, "I hadn't an idea that Chris —"

"Why, I told you. Didn't you get my postcard?"

"I got a postcard which I suppose was from you. I could read nothing on it but the words, Five-seventeen."

"Oh, well — come on."

There was a wagonette waiting for us. The luggage was piled in beside the groom, and we three climbed in behind. Then we started, and in three minutes had our heads together like pictures of Guy Fawkes and his companions.

We learned the following facts. First, that Algy was to arrive in time for lunch next day and was to stay at least a week. Second, that Dick had seen him on the Sunday and had extricated from him the remark that he was to go down to Esher in November and that he knew Miss Maple was to be there. Third, we received a full account of the interview with Lady Brasted and all her observations, expressed and unexpressed. Chris said very little. I did all the necessary questioning. He nodded his head three or four times and finally sat back as if rather bored.

"Well?" cried Dick.

Chris said nothing, and I looked at him.

"Look here, you know," said Dick, "this is really rather serious. You must tell me what to say. I *can't do* these things, you know. If he marries

Miss Maple — and, you know, I quite think he might in his present mood — well — don't you think so?"

He looked at me, and I nodded. And I did not in the least want him to marry Miss Maple.

"She's eight years older than he is, at least. Besides, I . . . I don't think I trust her. I'm beastly sorry for her. There's something the matter, I don't know what. Chris say something."

"Dick," said Chris, "you must give me time to think. I don't see my way out yet."

He said this very seriously, and Dick fell back a little.

"Well, so long as you tell me . . ." he grumbled. "Look, there's Mrs. Stirling."

We took off our hats to the Vicar's wife, and presently turned into the lodge gates in silence.

Amplefield is a large, comfortable, unbeautiful Georgian house. It was Dick's by inheritance, but a priest cannot do much with a country estate, so he had installed a penniless cousin and his wife here, to their great satisfaction, and only came down occasionally himself. At present the cousin and his wife were away. No doubt in time they or their children would inherit it.

We had tea on the lawn, and once more we talked about Algy. We dined on the terrace, looking out

upon the darkening meadows, between large stone vases that dripped with nasturtiums, with an electric lamp on the table, against which moths blundered in vain, and still we talked of Algy. Chris did not say a great deal, but he seemed to listen with attention and put shrewd questions now and again. When coffee had gone and smoking had begun, for the first time he opened his mouth in oracles.

"Now, look here," he said. "You've asked us down here to consult about Algy Banister. We all know him pretty well, in different ways, and we're all interested in him. Now Dick has said his say, and you"— he nodded to me —"you haven't said half of what you think. Will you finish first, or shall I?"

"You," I said; and sat back to listen.

Chris crossed one knee over the other, put his hands behind his head and began.

"First of all, I think we've gossiped too much — myself included. We mustn't get fussy and managing. We aren't running this affair — it's Algy. At the same time I don't know what's the good of us if we don't do what we can. You can't let a man drift.

"But there's this to be considered. Are we first perfectly sure that a marriage with Miss Maple isn't the best possible thing for him and her too? (Of *course* I don't know her.) Well, I'm not. But,

on the other hand, we are all perfectly sure, I take it, that he ought not to marry her simply in order to escape from his Vocation; still less ought he to be jockeyed into it. But that, if I understand rightly, is precisely what Dick thinks Lady Brasted is going to try to do. Now we all know that Algy once thought himself in love with Miss Maple. Now that's a dangerous state to be in. I know it from experience." (He paused for an instant.) "It was in love, in fact, that I made such an ass of myself. Remember, Dick?"

Dick nodded gravely, his chin on his hand, on the opposite side of the table.

"Well, then," continued Chris slowly, "all this being so, it seems to me probable that, unless we do something, Algy may be made to marry Miss Maple, always supposing that she will have him. . . ."

"Oh! she'll have him," I said.

". . . Always supposing that she will have him," continued Chris imperturbably. "You see, he can't go home; that makes a man feel lonely. He once was, or thought he was, in love with her. Then there's the possibility that she may become a Catholic, and, finally, there are Lady Brasted's tolerably clear hints that she thinks it would be an excellent thing and Dick's statement that Algy is going to Esher knowing that Miss Maple's to be there. Have I summed it up so far?"

"Perfectly," said Dick.

"Well," went on Chris tranquilly. "I'm not going to lift a finger to push this boy towards what we all have thought might be his Vocation. If a mistaken marriage can be purgatory, mistaken Celibacy is Hell. Personally I believe that it is his Vocation, but very possibly I'm wrong, and it's literally playing with fire, the hottest and the most real fire in existence, to meddle in these affairs. It burns cruelly. I know that by experience. But what I am prepared to do is to counteract, so far as I can, Lady Brasted's plans. It seems to me that that's only fair to Algy. He must be really free."

He paused again.

"Yes," cried Dick and I simultaneously.

"Well, what?" said Chris, still staring at the stars.

"What are we to do?"

"I haven't the slightest idea yet," said Chris.

(II)

At a quarter to one on the following day we three were sitting once more on the terrace, waiting for the sound of wheels. Dick looked nervous; I felt it. Chris alone was serene.

He had refused to talk any more about Algy the *night before*. He had repeated that he had not the *faintest idea* how to proceed; that it was enough

that we were agreed upon what was to be done; that all else must wait until there were further data. For the collection of these data we had both arranged to remain at Amplefield for one more night.

"How'll you find out?" asked Dick for the fourth time that morning.

"I have no idea," said Chris

Then there was the hiss of wheels beyond the house; Dick got up and hurried indoors; and two minutes later they came out together.

I had not seen Algy since his reception into the Church, and I looked at him carefully. There was no kind of doubt that the boy was undergoing a strain of some sort. He was a little pale under the eyes, a line came and went over them too easily and his lips were apt to compress themselves suddenly. His manner was subdued and undefinably grown-up.

He nodded pleasantly to us, with rather a detached air, and sat down in a long chair. It was plain enough that even if we wished to manage him, we should find some difficulty. He crossed one leg over the other, tilted his hat forward and was silent.

The absurd side of it all struck me forcibly as we sat there waiting for the gong. Here were we, three grown men, all intensely interested in the ca-

reer of a rather uninteresting boy, all gravely concerned as to his future. For, in all outward matters, even in matters of heart and head, Algy was uninteresting. He was not particularly clever; he was not attractively impulsive; his manners were not especially anything. He had done nothing great; he never would; nothing particularly important turned upon him. Yet there was something in him that mattered. I cannot express it better than that. I knew that I for one, and Dick and Chris for two others, cared tremendously what became of him. He had the sort of significance that, let us say, a delicate child possesses that, unknown to himself, is heir to a dukedom. Everything matters — his health, his moods, his instincts, his faults, his virtues — far more than they seem to matter in the son of a coachman. To us three, Algy had that sort of interest; we felt that huge things depended on him. It was disconcerting too, to notice his rather peevish air. And there we sat in the hot August day, shaded by the great ugly house, staring out at the flowers and rolling park and the plantations, pretending to be sleepy or lazy, and all thinking hard of one thing.

Algy seemed a little astonished to see us all. He had not expected us both, he said, and Dick's assertion that he had warned him of it, did not remove that air of slight suspicion.

Then we talked of this and that and the other — of the train service between Marlesdon and London, of the extreme warmth of the day, of the comparative advantages in such weather of gray flannel and brown holland. You were cooler in the one, and felt cooler in the other, we decided.

It was not until lunch was half over that we made any advance at all. Dick made his first step.

"Look here," he said, "what's to be done this afternoon?"

We were silent.

"I'll tell you the possibilities," he said. "There's a lake in which boating can be done. There's a terrace which can be sat upon. There's a motor of my cousin's in the stable; there's a wagonette and a pair of horses. There's a group of pine trees in which pigeons live; but I don't expect they'll be home till late. That's the lot."

We were still silent.

"You," he said, nodding at me.

"Lake," I said instantly.

"Algy?"

"I wish I could," he said, "but I get cramp. What about the motor?"

"All right. That's two. Chris?"

"I think motor. What'll you do?"

Dick paused an infinitesimal moment, as Algy glanced *sideways* at Chris.

"I think lake too," he said. "Then the motor at three? Where'll you go?"

"How about seeing Foxhurst?" said Chris.

Now a certain scene in Chris's not very reputable past life had been ended at Foxhurst, and for an instant Dick sat dumb. Then he recovered himself.

"Very good," he said. "It's worth seeing, Algy. Such a place; a moat, a courtyard, a king's room. . . ."

"Are they away?" interrupted Chris.

"Every blessed soul except the chaplain. It's an old Catholic house, Algy. It'll just give you an idea. . . . Well, then, three o'clock."

Chris nodded.

Now, upon my word, this had not been rehearsed. Chris had refused to rehearse anything. He is the most consistent believer in Providence I have ever met. He had said two or three times with great emphasis that he was not going to fuss and arrange. Matters were not brought to satisfactory conclusions by such methods. He had refused to make any plans as to how the day was to be spent. If it was intended by the Authorities that we were to accomplish anything, circumstances would arrange themselves. And they had, with a vengeance.

I sat through the rest of lunch in a daze. It was *not that* I at all understood how things would work

out; but at least I saw a very pretty train of powder laid. First, there was the fact that Algy and Chris were to spend the afternoon together, and next, there was the fact that Foxhurst, which had occurred to none of us, was to be the scene of their journey. Now Foxhurst had also been the scene of the stupendously important crisis of Chris's life. It was there that his real conversion had taken place; he had worked as a gardener there; he had had his pride and his posing knocked out of him there, in spite of Dick's meddling; he had actually attempted suicide there, and had been saved from it at the last possible moment by that amazing man John Rolls, whose mantle had fallen so strangely upon him.

Now I did not see how Chris would use all this, particularly as Algy's mood did not seem promising; but I knew him well enough to know that he would use it. So I sat and drank my coffee in silence.

We went out on to the terrace presently again, and Algy heard a good deal more of the glories that he was to behold. Dick, in a rather feverish manner, I thought, and certainly at great length, described pretty nearly every room in the house; while Chris sat by smiling gently to himself.

At five minutes to three we heard the panting of

the engine. Dick went through the house with them to see them off.

Three minutes later he burst back again, and shook me violently by the shoulder.

"Good Lord," he said, "don't you see?"

Two minutes later I said that I saw.

(III)

Dick and I went down to bathe that afternoon, but I have no distinct recollection of the experience. We talked spasmodically, when we were not otherwise engaged, and more than once I was again stricken into silence by the absurdity of the whole affair. I can only repeat that I was more excited than I had been by anything for a long time, and yet when the thing was put into words it was so entirely inadequate. All that I can say is that I felt as I suppose a stable-boy must feel when the pride of the stable is on his trial. I knew, in a manner I cannot describe at all, that underneath that uninteresting Algy there was something unique in my own small experience. It was genius that I perceived there, and genius in a plane of which not one in a thousand people takes any account at all. I perceived, I say, and later events are beginning to show whether I was right or no, that here was a soul endowed with certain faculties *which, to* my mind, are sublimely the highest in ex-

istence. And the excitement turned on the point as to whether these would be allowed to exercise themselves or no. That was all.

We came up with our towels about five o'clock; but there was no sign of the motor. We sent for tea and drank it, and talked and waited. At six the Angelus rang: at half-past six we heard the panting come up the drive. We waited. Then a man came out to say that the motor had returned with the message that the two gentlemen would walk back. Then we waited again.

We hardly said anything at all. Dick went and got his office-book presently, but I could see that he was all alert for any sound. His eyes rolled round occasionally, as do a dog's who is resting and yet is absorbed in his master's movements. For myself, I sat staring and thinking. I would finish my office after dinner, I said to myself.

Then suddenly, without warning, Chris came up the steps from the kitchen-garden and, without a word, sat down abruptly.

"Well?" whispered Dick.

"He's gone for a walk alone," said Chris without moving. "He'll be back for dinner. He's given me some messages for you. He wants no sort of reference to be made to his affairs, either to-night or at any future time, until things are settled."

We nodded together.

"Now listen," he said. "He's given me leave to tell you the whole thing."

Chris leaned forward, joining his fingers.

"We went to Foxhurst. We saw all over it. Then we inquired for the chaplain and found he was out. Then we asked to see his house. We went in, and I pointed out to Algy various things, the room I slept in, the hook over the window, the staircase where you and Rolls stood when I was preparing to hang myself. I didn't explain it; I only asked him to notice all those things. He hardly said anything at all. I could see he was beginning to be uncomfortable. He was also rather suspicious. You noticed that, of course.

"When we came out, I asked him if he'd mind walking home as I'd rather a long story to tell him. He said all right, though I could see he didn't want to. We sent the motor off, and we started to walk by the fields.

"Well, you can guess. I started by saying that I knew quite well what he thought; he thought it was a plan to manage him. I asked him if that wasn't so. He looked rather taken aback, but confessed it was so. I acknowledged the fact, and then went ahead. I told him the whole thing from beginning to end; about my own beastly pride, my self-indulgence — pretty well everything that I decently *could.* I told him all about Annie, all about my

posing, and at last I told him every single detail of that last night — all I felt as I was getting the rope ready: all about the interruption — the whole thing. Finally, I told him what Rolls said to me. I must confess that I got more moved than I have been for a long time when I told him that. I could see him getting paler and paler as I rubbed it in about self-deception and all the damnable nonsense there is in people who fight against the Will of God. I just said it as plainly as I knew how. Then at the end I turned on him.

"I said I was only a layman, that I didn't want to pry into secrets, that nobody did; but that it seemed to me, and you two — oh! yes, I gave you both away — that he was resisting light. I said I wouldn't, for the sake of my own soul, let alone his, urge him for one single second to do what his conscience didn't wholly and entirely tell him to do; but that I was sick of seeing people — Catholics, too — just chuck away their life out of cowardice or pride or stupidity. Then I told him plainly that the only thing that mattered in this world or the next was to do the Will of God.

"Well, he began by being conventional. He warded me off, saying that it was extremely difficult, wasn't it? to know what was best to do; that, of course, he wished to do the right thing, but that it was beginning to seem to him that it was perhaps

better just to be normal and to live an ordinary life — oh! you know: all the things that we are always palming off on one another. When he'd quite done I said just that."

"What did you say exactly?" interrupted Dick.

Chris smiled.

"To be accurate, I said, 'Just so. Now let's have what you really think.' Well; I got home at last. We were sitting on the grass by now, and he was chewing a long piece of grass. Then, quite suddenly, after a particularly offensive remark of mine, he caved in altogether and rolled round on to his face without another word. (Oh! by the way, he had called me a — a damned bully, two minutes before.) I told him not to behave like a woman. He got up at last, and as soon as he could speak he told me that we were all perfectly right, that he was a cur, and a fool and that he would go off and be a Carthusian to-morrow."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Dick.

"Wait. I pulled him up at that. I said that that wasn't at all the point. I asked him how he dared think that he had just got to go and that he'd be taken. I said there were a dozen things to consider first; his people; his duty to his estate — all kinds of things. Then I taxed him with Miss Maple, and, I must say, he was straightforward enough there. Oh! he's straight all through. He said

that he had been in love with her in a sort of way and that he was fooling with the thought of it even now . . . that he had practically made up his mind to marry her if she'd have him, simply in order to get away from the hell he's had in his heart at the thought of what his real vocation was. (We were right, you see.) I tell you, he's had a terrible time since his reception. He's as sensitive to God as a flower to the sun. It's been torment. . . . Oh! he shirked it for all the usual reasons — terror of the loneliness, the mortifications, all the rest. Well, I began to encourage him then. I said that that was all the merest moonshine, that if he had a vocation and corresponded with it, there was such happiness waiting for him as the rest of us can't get till we get to heaven. . . . Well; so we went on. He got quiet at last, about a mile from here, out there across the fields. But he said he couldn't face you yet. Mind not one word when he comes back. We'd better have some bridge this evening, Dick."

"That was clever of you — about acknowledging that it was partly true we wanted to manage him," I mused aloud.

"Clever!" snapped Chris. "It was simply honest."

"But, but what next? . . ." I ejaculated, suddenly remembering myself.

"Ah! yes. I'd forgotten. Well, the next thing is his people."

Dick shook his head dolefully.

"Look here," said Chris; "it's no good being despondent. It's got to be done."

"Will he go there?" I asked breathlessly.

"Why, of course not," snapped Chris almost rudely; "and he won't write either. No: I'll tell you what we've settled."

"Well?"

Chris smiled at our anxious faces.

"Don't be alarmed. We three have got to go. Not yet. I'll let you know when."

There was an awe-struck pause.

"What about Miss Maple?" asked Dick presently.

"One thing at a time," said Chris.

CHAPTER III

(1)

ALGY awoke early on the morning of the first Saturday in November, and, finding sleep impossible, lit a candle, took up a book which he presently laid aside again, and began to doze sometimes open-eyed, staring at the window, sometimes half-drowsing. His bedroom was singularly unsuited for romance. It was what is called a comfortable apartment for a single gentleman, and he paid for it the excessive charge of twelve shillings a week. He had done what he could, but there were some things he dared not do. He dared not remove the photograph of the landlady's father, which was exactly like all other photographs of all other landladies' fathers and which hung over his mantelpiece, nor the black hearthrug resembling the hide of an effeminate retriever. For the rest, the room was fairly inoffensive. He had ventured to take down a text, in a frame, that hung over his bed and to replace it by a small brass crucifix. His bed was of iron and tarnished brass, his chest of drawers, his wash-hand stand and his wardrobe, of mahog-

any. A new bath stood in the middle of his floor upon a new bath-mat. He had found it necessary to buy these things, since the other single gentleman in the house required the only bath possessed by the house every Saturday night, which made difficulties on Sunday morning. Such was Algy's hired abode in Kensington; and, as he lay there, reflecting that he was due at Esher this evening and listening to the workmen's trains running into Earl's Court a hundred yards away, he remembered with pleasure that he would have a real bath to-morrow in which he could lie down.

He reflected on a good many things this morning, on Monsignor Dick whom he knew he was to meet, upon Crowston and his own spacious bedroom there which he had forfeited, with its pleasant wall-paper, its stiff chintz bed-curtains and the opulent suggestion of the footman's entrance with hot water. He even did me the honor, he told me, of reflecting upon me. But chiefly he thought, as so often now, of the curious lull that seemed to have fallen upon him since his final decision in the summer.

Until that time he had experienced a continual discomfort, which he described to me as neuralgia of the soul. It had been enough to spoil everything; yet it was not, so to speak, in the least degree a mortal disease. He knew perfectly well that he

was bound by no law of God or man to enter the Religious Life. He could remain a good Catholic without it, he could marry, if he wished, he could succeed tranquilly to Crowston, when the time came, preserve game for some months and kill it for six, beget sons and daughters, give balls at Christmas, and all the rest of it, no god or man forbidding him. (Mary Maple, of course, occurred to him in this connection, as he reviewed what might have been possible, but gently, without perturbation, almost with pathos. Once or twice, as he dozed there on his back, her serious, pleasant face, framed in brown hair, formed and faded again.) Yet the contemplation of this conceivable future gave him spiritual neuralgia. He enjoyed nothing. It would begin to ache, like its physical correlative, simultaneously with the flush of spiritual pleasure. He had gone on like this for months, arguing with himself, mentioning it resolutely in confessing and trying, sometimes with success, to persuade his confessor to call it a scruple. Yet it had ached. Then Chris had taken the matter in hand, and probed deep, with horrible directness, right down to the nerve itself; the pain had been overpowering, and Algy had collapsed.

Since then the ache had marvelously ceased. Instead of it there had welled up in his soul an extraordinarily strange and aromatic kind of pleasure

which never altogether left him. I say "aromatic," because it had the effect upon him of a slightly anæsthetic drug, it made everything seem a little unreal, it was of an unusual quality and it was extremely sweet. . . .

He reflected this morning on how very unreal everything was except those large Facts which he had embraced. He did his work in the office neither better nor worse than usual, but he did it mechanically. He caught his train at nine-five every morning except when he occasionally missed it, he stepped out at the Mansion House, he went along the street and turned up the stone staircase. At his desk he wrote in his ledgers (or whatever they are) and observed Jewish gentlemen in top-hats, and rose at the sound of a certain hand-bell, and all the rest of it; and it was all as unreal as a poorly acted play. It seemed to have no connection with him. Real life, vibrating, absorbing, energetic, lay down there in Sussex behind those high walls in the dead silence of whitewashed rooms and the echoing solitudes of the cloister.

Now I am quite aware that this sounds fantastic nonsense. I say nothing to that. That is not my affair. I am relating what Algy told me of himself and particularly what he told me of his thoughts this morning as he lay in bed and looked at things *with half-shut* eyes.

It was in this aspect, too, that he looked forward to Esher. Without a touch of contempt, only of wonder, he regarded life as he would find it there — the life of Crowston in another setting — the same solemnities, the elaborations of existence, the earnest zeal with which time would be carefully killed — bled to death — the overwhelming gravity with which the hours for meals, the precedence of persons and the rules for doing unimportant things would be observed. He did not underrate rules and methods; they were necessary of course for the preservation of the object for which they were designed: he would find himself, at Parkminster, under far more stringent rules than those he had known; but with regard to Esher and Crowston he asked himself in vain what was the object which these did enshrine, and he found no answer. They seemed to be ends in themselves.

He thought presently again about Mary Maple. He knew nothing of course of her approach to the Church, and yet, in an impersonal way, he found himself a little uneasy when he thought of her. He had been extraordinarily fond of her a few months ago, though in that queer idealistic way I have described, and that had given him, it seemed, a certain insight, as it generally does. Love, which, as the proverb implies, loses at least one eye, seems to have the other remarkably enlightened, and it ap-

peared to Algy that Mary, too, had been a little discontented with her existence. Most of Algy's old friends had done nothing in particular, but Mary was the only one of them who had ever shown any signs of not being wholly satisfied with it all. She had shown it, he thought, by her silences, by chance sentences, by an air which she occasionally wore. He knew he was to meet her at Esher this evening; he wondered whether he would say anything to her.

So there he lay this morning, sleepily content, pondering, expectant, till it was time to get up. He was agreeably moved, in spite of his views, by the prospect of Esher. It would be pleasant to be down to-night in a decent bedroom with agreeable furniture; it would be pleasant, in a superficial sort of way, to have really nice things to eat, to move in the atmosphere that he had lost and that he would lose far more finally when the proper time came. He did not in the least yearn after the flesh-pots; he was bound for the wilderness with a good heart, but it was not altogether uncongenial to find on the edge of it, for perhaps the last time, a well-served meal and a real spring bed and to be called by a deft footman.

It would be pleasant, too, to talk with all these people again who moved always in such surround*ings* — with even the Brasteds and Monsignor Dick

and with whom ever else happened to be there and with Mary Maple.

I have set all this down at length because it will be useful to bear in mind in what mood Algy went to Esher.

(II)

I have been there myself. The house is an extremely pleasant and comfortable one, and the Brasteds have somehow managed, I suppose, tacitly, to divide it very adroitly into the Church and the world. The dining-room and hall are neutral ground; the rest consists of two territories. It is the only way, I suppose, of keeping the peace. The drawing-room, Lady Brasted's morning-room and a charming little oak-parlor where smoking is permitted are all ecclesiastical: the library, the smoking-room proper and the study are secular. It is really an ingenious arrangement. Priests and ecclesiastical laymen somehow tend to find themselves smoking in the oak-parlor: a woman naturally goes to the drawing-room, or, if she is definitely secular, to the library. I found when I was there that the oak-parlor was supposed to be my destination always; yet — I blush to confess it — I was more often to be found in the smoking-room. Somehow I do not take to Lady Brasted's ecclesiasticism. I

even said my office in the library in preference to anywhere else.

Hither, then, came poor Algy, just in time for dinner, to find already assembled in the hall his host and hostess, Mr. Jack Hamilton, Monsignor Yolland and Miss Mary Maple. The Church was plainly holding her own. He made his salutations and apologies and ran upstairs to dress, vaguely pleased, as he had expected.

Nothing particular happened that evening. He did not even sit next Mary. She sang a song or two in the drawing-room afterward, and he saw without a qualm — in fact, with a faint detached amusement — Jack Hamilton hand her her candle. He remembered his old ambitions. He joined in the rather desultory conversation in the smoking-room and looked rather white and tired; at least, so Dick told me. But he liked it all very much, he told me himself.

Again, next morning, nothing particular happened. He served Dick's mass in church, came back to breakfast and spent the time till lunch chiefly in the library. Lady Brasted and Miss Maple went to the eleven o'clock mass. It was not until after lunch that Lady Brasted opened fire.

She lured him first to the oak-parlor, and then begged of him to smoke.

Now it must be remembered that Algy had no conception that she was in the least interested in his future, or that she linked, in the remotest way, Mary's name and his in her mind. It was scarcely possible for Dick to warn him! So when she began to talk about Mary, Algy, still with that sense of the extreme unreality and unimportance of such things, of which I have spoken, responded warmly. Lady Brasted really did it very well.

"You know dear Mary is under instruction?" she said suddenly.

"Good Lord, no!" said Algy, really startled. "I didn't indeed."

"Why, yes," murmured the lady. "Monsignor didn't tell you?"

"Of course not. Why? Is he instructing her?"

"I thought you would be sure to know. Of course, it's quite private at present."

This rather worked up Algy. He had no idea even that Mary was dreaming of such a thing. He began to think of her with a new interest again.

Then Lady Brasted played her second card.

"You know, Mr. Algy, I think it must have been you who first put it into her mind. She has spoken to me of you so often and of your courage in telling them at Crowston."

(This was a little crude, I think, and Algy would

surely have begun to suspect something if he had not been in that queer mood. But he has assured me that he suspected nothing.)

Then Lady Brasted went on, really very cleverly indeed, to talk about Mary's confidences to herself. Algy's own name was not so much as breathed again. It was just a very artistic and moving picture of a simple soul finding its way to the light. Lady Brasted's voice can tremble rather touchingly on occasions, and it did so several times this afternoon. She spoke of Mary as a "poor child"; she managed to suggest youthfulness, inexperience, and deep, untrained spirituality; and, in Algy's unpractical and remote mood, it had a very considerable effect. He was quite off his guard. He heard as a priest hears such tales. It did not come within the range of the most imaginative possibility that all this had any personal bearing on himself, since he regarded himself now as pledged to another life. Yet, at the same time, it did its work sufficiently. He began, so far as such external details touched him at all just now, to reawaken his interest in Mary. A very faint veil of romance began to shroud her figure again, though he heard the talk now but as a story. He reflected once or twice on the strangeness of the situation, that whereas three months ago all this would have been of palpitating

interest, now it was hardly more than academical.

"Well," concluded Lady Brasted, "I expect she will tell you this evening herself. She is sure to, I think. Poor child! You must help her if you can."

Algy sat on a minute or two, after his hostess had rustled away, smiling gently to himself. How discreet Monsignor had been, he told himself! Then again, still academically, he began to day-dream.

He thought of his own calf-love of a little over a year ago and of what Mary had seemed to him then. What a mysterious thing this Love was, this extraordinary, unreasoning adoration. . . . It had waned then. Then, like an Indian summer it had half revived, when he was struggling to escape from the insistent voice in his soul. Then he had definitely rejected it; and now, once more, circumstances adjusted themselves to an almost perfect frame for its reawakening. Then, with what would have been culpable rashness, if Algy had been himself, he began, as a purely imaginative picture, to reconstruct the future as it might be. Certainly Mary was a good deal older than he was; but that did not matter much. She was very acceptable at Crowston; he liked her extremely; he could, no doubt, even revive romance. She was to be a Cath-

olic then! . . . How ideal life might be at Crowston with her. . . . They could build a little chapel! . . .

Then he suddenly jerked his head, woke up smiling at himself and went briskly out to find Dick.

(III)

They went a little walk in the falling rain, looked in at the church, and came back to tea in the hall. The two ladies were there. Brasted and Jack came in rather late, and when all was done, Algy, scarcely with any program, yet conscious that something was expected of him, moved off to the oak-parlor.

It is a most charming little room, though faintly suggestive of a really first-rate house-decorator. Lady Brasted bought the paneling as it stood from a Jacobean manor house, at a great price; she had it fitted into this room and then proceeded to furnish it with articles of precisely the right date, Jacobean tables and chairs, an open hearth with steel dogs and fire-plate, a couple of chests, a piece of tapestry and a stiff-looking couch of extreme comfort. There are sconces on the walls, fitted with wax candles. In fact, it is a room of real beauty on the one side and of repulsive perfection on the other. But it is a seductive little room.

Algy sat down on the couch and began to consider.

He was just very slightly excited. He would have been a mature saint if he had not been. The unreality was still there; and in this, I suppose, he found reassurance. He mistook it for real detachment, which it certainly is not. Naturally he thought about Mary with an agreeable sense of condescension and pity.

After about a quarter of an hour the door opened, and she came in.

I despair of describing dresses; but she wore, I understand, what is known as a tea-gown of some rather rich, dark, silky material, her splendid hair was done up in the proper manner, and she came rustling forward as upright as a dart, carrying her head superbly.

She began by paying him the exquisite compliment of saying nothing. She had just knelt down by the fire and spread her beautiful hands to the red glow, allowing her deep sleeves to fall back and show her arms to the elbow. And still she said nothing a while.

This silence was a masterpiece. It established an intimacy at once. Algy strove to make a commonplace remark, but he was not bold enough to speak of the weather. Anything would be bathos, it would even be profane.

Then she looked at him suddenly, sideways, still with her hands outstretched.

"Annie has told you, she says?"

"Yes; just now."

"You congratulate me?"

"Of course I do."

Again silence fell. Mary shifted a little, raising one knee and resting her elbows across it.

It began to seem to Algy as if the unreality were fading a little. It was all so intimate and so pleasant. Her company was full of Crowston associations too. This life in London was so singularly unlike this charming feminine domesticity that I am not surprised that he was moved. He had hardly spoken to a woman for months, except to Lady Brasted; and now this woman, above all others, had peculiar bonds with him. He had been furiously in love with her, he believed, a year ago, she was closely associated with his own home, and now she was drawing nearer that union in faith that is so vital among Catholics. He began to have a sense that all this was a little dangerous; but it was too pleasant to resist. Understand, please, again, that he was not at this moment in love with her, but that he had been in a sort of way. It is quite as often untrue as it is true that a burnt child fears the fire; burnt children sometimes love it, or, at any rate, cannot keep away from it. . . . Algy looked at Mary. . . .

Then Mary spoke again.

"I want you to help me," she said.

"Yes?"

"Oh! I want you just to talk to me. You are inside; I am still outside. . . . Tell me this. Is it really as wonderful as it seems?"

"It is quite different," said poor Algy. "Yes; it is far more wonderful; but it is different."

"The glamour goes, you mean?"

"Well, yes; the glamour. But something else comes instead. I can't describe it; I have only been a Catholic a few months myself."

She nodded meditatively three or four times. Her lips were parted; she was looking steadily at the fire; her eyes had that strange brilliance that comes when light rises on to the face from beneath; her face was extraordinarily young and childish in the glow.

Then, without any warning, Algy's heart began to hammer, and that odd contraction of the throat seized on him which shows that one part of the nature at least is profoundly stirred. At the same time a thrill, at once icy and tingling, ran through him, a mist passed over his eyes and went again, and Algy became aware that something had happened to him entirely new in his experience. (It is exceedingly difficult to put it into words; yet I must do my best.)

First, then, that veil of unreality, which had lain

upon him so long, was gone in a clap, the material world asserted itself, and he perceived that he was a man in the world of men and that Mary was a woman. It was not in the least the old idealism; it was something else of which he had known nothing, and it shook his curbed nature like a sudden storm. In a sense, he perceived what had happened, that it was his own fault, and yet he did not care. It was as a flood of wine, drenching his soul, intoxicating by its fumes, lifting him on its surge. He lay there tossing, knowing that he had but to relinquish the tiny mechanical effort that he still made, and that he would drown in sweetness.

He knew everything in this moment — that Mary loved him, that she waited for him to speak, that ambition and love of Mary was mixed in her mind; he knew that he had been asked here for this very purpose; he guessed that if the two women had not spoken of the plan outright, at least that they understood one another and that this opportunity had been formed with deliberation. He knew that it should have sickened him, yet that it did not. . . . For here was Mary, here was he, as in a flame of fire that bewildered him by its fierce sweetness, and behind lay a vision of Crowston, with all those details of which he had thought so lingeringly.

His Vocation, in those moments, stood back from

him, as a fog sways back in a breeze, and he saw it retire without regret. More, he understood now, as never before, what he had proposed to renounce and what to embrace. As in an intellectual vision, he saw on one side the leisurely home-life, domestic joys, comfort, ease, human love, all transfigured in light; on the other the cell that waited, dead silent, white-washed, lonely, his little garden, the darkness and chill of nights, the hardness of wood and stone; and the mystic color was gone from their surfaces.

It was as a receding vision that he saw this; it was impossible and ludicrous . . . more and more impossible. Ordinary life was real, the rest was dreams. Here, then, all that was real was incarnate in a woman, and on her, and on all that for which she stood, shone the light that was gone from the life of his imagination. He saw what men call Facts transfigured, and every pulse in him cried for their embrace, demanding the satiety that they alone could give. They stood there, welcoming him, crying for him in return. . . . In an instant he would seize them in his arms.

So, then, in this moment of perception, he hung between the two worlds, in a delirious delight of hesitation. The brink of wine rose to his lips, and he held them there, glorying in its sweetness, delay-

ing in sheer luxury the action that would make it his. . . . He waited for a movement from the other.

Then it came.

Very slowly she shifted her position once more, lowering her knee, leaning back a little as if to lift her face from the fire. He saw the edge of keen light run up her as she moved; her supple waist, her strong shoulders, the curve of throat and chin and the gleam in her eyes and on her brown-gold hair. Then she began slowly to lift her eyes to his. . . .

There was a step in the hall, and Dick came in abruptly.

"Hello, Algy!" he said.

(IV)

Dick had been vaguely uncomfortable after tea. He had sat on with the Brasteds a minute or two after Mary's departure. Jack too had strolled off to the smoking-room, but Brasted still lingered. He had really rather neglected his guests this afternoon, and, I suppose, wished to make amends.

Then he too went, and Dick was left with his hostess.

Now Dick had no definite suspicions of Algy. He guessed the cob-web intricacies that Annie Brasted was weaving; but he did not fear them; Algy's *purpose* was surely too strong.

He had noticed that there was something odd about the boy this time, though he could scarcely have put it into words. He told me later that all day the other had seemed to look at him from beneath a mask. There are some faces that seem so always, some become so by training; it is sad, I do not know with what justice, that the faces of priests are usually of this kind.

"No," Dick said to me. "He was not particularly troubled-looking, not sad at all, but just odd. When he talked to the others he was quite ordinary and quiet; he was exactly all that a *poseur* is not. But once or twice on the Sunday I saw something look out suddenly. It was like a face peeping from under a blind. But the worst of it was that I could not see its expression. Only, there it was; and then the blind dropped again. Do I remember what it was that was being said or done? Yes, I do happen to remember. Once it was when Miss Maple mentioned Crowston, he looked up at her quite suddenly; and another time I was saying something about a man I knew who had just died. It was something quite ordinary about how very upsetting it must be for certain kinds of people to die. . . . Yes; if you will have it, it was what is called the 'Inner Life' that looked out; I suppose one must call it that. But he hadn't got that look a year ago. . . . I'd almost say, six months ago."

It was this that, remarkably enough, had reassured Dick!

About Mary he was not so confident. She had come to him after his return in the summer, and after an interview or two had begged to be placed under instruction. Now what could Dick do? Mary seemed to know her reasons well enough; Lady Brasted had provided for that; and, by the end of October, Dick was convinced of her sincerity. Yet it was useless to pretend that there was not another motive mixed up in it all. (Lady Brasted had provided for that too.) Whether or no Mary was actually in love with Algy — of this Dick did not attempt to judge. At least she proposed to marry him; and what would happen when the girl heard that this young man was destined for Religion? Dick did the only possible thing. He dawdled. Yet he knew that Christmas must see the end.

He became, then, vaguely uncomfortable, when Mary had gone off without a word after Algy, with Lady Brasted's eyes carefully not following her.

Lady Brasted still continued her small talk. It was connected with Italy, and some view or another of a white convent with cypresses where she had once stayed. She kept it up very well, but Dick became restless, and she saw it.

"*Do* just come through into my room," she said,

rising. "I should so like to show you a little sketch I made."

A sudden resolution came to Dick.

"One instant," he said. "May I just get something from the oak-room? I'll come directly."

"I shan't keep you a moment," said Lady Brasted, "and I rather think —"

Dick pretended not to hear. It was extremely rude, but it was the only way.

"One moment," he said, and disappeared up the hall.

When he saw the two there, he determined to postpone seeing the sketch for the present.

"Hullo, Algy," he said; and then: "I say, you haven't seen my breviary?"

Algy got up without a word. The fire had sunk to a splendid red, and it was impossible to see his face. He looked silently on the couch behind him. Mary still knelt at the fire.

"May I just light the candles?" said Dick genially.

When the candles were alight, Mary stood up and turned her back on the fire.

"I can't see it anywhere," said Dick; and it was no wonder, since it was in the library, and he knew it perfectly well. Then he looked at the two.

Algy was very white indeed, with a very strained

look in his eyes. Mary seemed perfectly serene and, still standing before the hearth, glanced this way and that.

"Is it black morocco?" she said, without a note of discomposure.

"That's it."

"Then I think I saw it in the library."

"I'll have a look," said Algy abruptly and rather hoarsely, and he vanished.

"Were you talking?" asked Dick hypocritically, still not knowing what to think.

"Yes," said Mary. "I've just told him about myself."

She was so serene that Dick thought himself a fool for even his vague suspicions. She stood quite naturally, her hands behind her, and spoke straight. Dick had a distinct sense of satisfaction in looking at her. He determined that it was all right, and that he was a fool.

"I mustn't interrupt you," he said. "Lady Brasted's going to show me something. I'll just go after Algy."

He went out, passed across the hall, opened the door of the library and went in.

Algy was standing perfectly rigid by the mantelpiece, staring into the fire, with the book in his hands, and even now he did not take in the situation.

"Good Lord," he said; "was it there?"

Algy handed it him without a word.

"What's the matter, Algy?"

The boy did not move. Dick went up to him and put his hand on his shoulder.

"What's the matter?" he said again.

Algy shuddered, jerking his shoulder away, his face still turned to the fire.

"Don't touch me," he whispered.

Dick stood aghast.

"But —" he began.

Then, without a movement of warning, the boy threw himself in a crumpled heap into the deep-padded chair that stood behind him.

"Algy! Algy!"

"Oh! my God, my God!" wailed the boy. "Why did no one tell me? I never knew! I never knew."

Dick was down on his knees in a moment, after one terrified glance at the door.

"Algy; tell me this instant. . . . Don't behave like that!"

"Oh! my God!" groaned out the voice piteously. "But I know now. But why did no one tell me? God is cruel . . . cruel."

"Algy! how dare you behave like this? Be a man!"

Then, all in a moment the boy recovered himself

like a steel spring. He wheeled about and sat up, as the priest recoiled on to his heels.

"Oh! I can behave myself," he snarled. "Do you think I'm going to give in?"

Dick stood up, driving down his tumult of bewilderment by an affectation of contempt.

"Do you call that behaving yourself?" he sneered. "Why can't you tell me what's the matter, decently? . . . Algy, are you quite mad?"

Algy looked at him a moment, his eyes burning out of his white face. Then he got up, and stood, staring steadily at the priest.

"I will tell you then," he said slowly. "It is this. I understand now what I am going to. I did not before."

Dick struggled to keep his attitude of faint contempt. He still feared something resembling hysterics. But he was more terrified at something else.

"You had better," he said. "I suppose, at least, you mean the Religious Life."

"Just so," said Algy. "I mean the Religious Life."

"There are two sides to that," observed the priest; "they don't want emotional *dévots*."

Every word was an effort. He felt overpowered by something about this boy; yet he fought bravely to keep his head. It was as if he faced a tiger.

Algy thrust his face a little nearer.

"Yes," he said; "God is cruel. . . . Oh! I am not blaspheming. He demands everything."

"How dare —" began the priest.

"I am aware they do not want emotional *dévots*," snarled Algy. "That is exactly why I am going. . . . Look here, Monsignor, I thank God I know what it means now. Does that content you?"

(v)

Lady Brasted was waiting in some annoyance, with her sketch-book spread before her on a little table and herself in a deep arm-chair. She wished that priests were not so imperceptive. Here was this dear, good Monsignor, blundering like a blue-fly into her pious little web, to the shocking discomposure of its captives.

She had no particular motive, I gather, for her scheme, except that which is perhaps the most powerful motive known to man, namely an intention to have her own way and to manage people. She had conceived an idea that it would be very beautiful for these two young persons to marry — both converts, both old friends. A large section of her nature was really stupid — that section which deals with principles; the other, dealing with details and nuances and shades, was rather subtle. Her Italian convents showed that the drawing was bad, especially the perspective; the details and the colors were

quite beautiful. She liked, too, to patronize Mary.

She heard the steps come out of the oak-room, first one and then the other, and go across to the library. Then the door shut; and a long pause ensued.

She stood up at last, when ten minutes had passed, in a sort of holy impatience; and, as she was considering what was best to do, the door suddenly opened and Dick came in.

He looked rather odd, she thought; he breathed quickly, as a man who has been running, and his expression generally was not genial.

"At last! Monsignor," she said.

"May I speak to you?" said Dick.

Quite suddenly she too felt perturbed. The man looked angry. She could not conceive what it was all about. As she looked at him, paling a little, again she heard steps come out of the library, cross the hall and begin to go upstairs.

"Why, certainly," she said, and sat down again. Dick still stood on the edge of the hearth-rug, where he had halted. His head was thrust forward a little, like a bull, and he still breathed sharply.

"Lady Brasted," he said, "you must forgive me if I seem impertinent; but I want to ask you a question. It is this. Are you trying to bring about a marriage between Miss Maple and Algy?"

Gentle, spiritual-looking women occasionally have

a touch of vixenish temper in their characters. If their aspirations are to spirituality they can generally keep this (greatly to their credit) under control, even interiorily. But this horribly direct question pricked Lady Brasted very sharply indeed. She flushed, ever so slightly, and a little sharpness came into her delicate face.

"Is that — er — a question you have any business to ask, Monsignor?"

Dick shifted a little on his feet; then he straightened himself.

"I dare say not," he said. "Certainly not, if you do not wish to answer it. I beg your pardon then. . . . But then I must just say what I have to say. It is this: If anybody has any idea of a possible marriage between Algy and Miss Maple, I should like it to be made quite clear to them that it will not do. . . . I see I must be perfectly frank. Algy is hoping to enter Religion. . . . That is quite private, if you please, except for the purpose I have implied. If you think that — er — that any one should know this, who is likely to be interested in the scheme of this marriage, it would be a charity to let them know the facts."

Dick bowed rather pompously and turned away.

"Stop!" cried Lady Brasted — and he stopped.

"I don't understand in the least, Monsignor. This is quite new, isn't it?"

Dick hesitated. Then he smiled carefully.

"You must allow me, too, not to answer that," he said. "I have leave from Algy to say as much as I have said, but no more."

He saw her flush again, slightly. He rather admired her self-control. Then she leaned back more easily.

"Dear me," she said quietly. "This is a great surprise to me. And do you think he really has a Vocation?"

Dick jerked his head a little.

"May I sit down a moment?" he said. (This kind of pompous fencing seemed to him ridiculous. He determined to be frank.)

"Let me be quite plain," he said. "I know you won't be offended. May I really speak out?"

"Please do," she said, with quite a pleasant smile.

"Well — honestly — I think it's a pity to interfere. I know you mean to be kind and don't want anything at all but Algy's good; but, really and truly, as a priest, I do ask you not to do anything more just now. It's a long story, and I could not possibly tell you all the details; but it comes to this. I am perfectly convinced — more than ever now from something that has just happened — that this boy has got a Vocation. I think it's a dreadful pity to distract him and complicate matters just now; *and,* I don't think it's quite fair to Miss Maple.

May I ask you, quite simply, to leave things alone for the present? His people don't know yet. They will have to be told. There are a heap of complications. . . . Please don't add to them, Lady Brasted."

Dick would have disarmed a child. But Lady Brasted was not a child. She was a rather suspicious and very elaborate woman. She was silent a moment, from sheer annoyance. It was intolerable that she should be told her business by an imperceptive priest.

"And you think Miss Maple should be warned off?" she said sweetly.

It was Dick's turn to flush.

"Please don't think of me as having formed any opinion at all about Miss Maple. I simply say what I think best."

Lady Brasted looked at the fire without speaking.

"It is very kind of you to take all this trouble, Monsignor; I felt sure that dear Mr. Algy was in good and careful hands."

Dick glanced up. But there was not a trace of sarcasm in her tone or air.

"Then —" he began.

There were steps in the hall, the rustle of a dress; Dick stood up hastily and Mary walked in.

"Thank you so much, Lady Brasted," he said. "I really must go and say office."

There was silence for a minute or two after the door closed.

"Did you have a pleasant talk, my dear?" purred Annie.

Mary knelt down by the fire, as she had knelt just now in the oak-room; and again she said nothing.

"I am so sorry our little week-end is almost finished," went on the other tranquilly. "You must come down again, Mary, dear, before Christmas; and Mr. Algy must come too."

CHAPTER IV

(1)

ON the eighteenth of November I received at Cambridge a grim little birthday present in the form of a note enclosed in one from Chris. It ran as follows:

"CROWSTON, SUSSEX,
"*November* 16.

"MY DEAR SIR:

"I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter and to say that I shall be happy to see you and your two friends on the 25th. You do not inform me of the nature of the news you wish to lay before me, beyond saying that it concerns my son Algernon and that you come from him. But you must allow me to say that if it has any bearing upon my decision that my son must not live at home, I feel it right to tell you that no arguments you can bring before me will have any effect. I say this to spare you the trouble of coming on a useless errand. Perhaps you will kindly assure me that this is not the case.

"Yours faithfully,
"JOHN T. BANISTER."

"C. DELL, Esq."

Chris added a line or two to say that he had sent this assurance and had announced that we would arrive by the three-fifty on the date mentioned. We could leave again a little after six. He asked me to send both the notes on to Dick.

Now I knew hardly anything of what had happened at Esher, beyond what a rather exultant and incoherent note from Dick had conveyed to me. In it he hinted that something had happened which confirmed his own belief in the boy's vocation and that the way would now be cleared of Miss Maple. He promised to tell me more when we met.

I spent the next few days in conjecture. I put Miss Maple aside. I felt I did not know enough; and confined myself to Algy. At this time I knew nothing of Algy's father except what Algy himself had told me; and a son is not usually a good critic of his parents. I scarcely knew what to expect. From the letter I deduced a strong will, an ambition to be business-like and an entire lack of imagination. The handwriting corroborated these points. The letter was written with a "J" pen, itself a significant detail; the lines were level; the capitals unimportant; there was a thick black line beneath the signature; one or two of the words tailed off rather. I said to myself, oracularly, that here was a strong man, but not so strong as he thought.

I began to wonder all over again what in the world this man would make of the Contemplative Life. Probably he would be under the impression that there were no Contemplatives at this beginning of the twentieth century and that what there had been before the days of breezy King Hal had devoted themselves entirely to chambering and wantonness, to enormous meals such as are depicted in comic papers, to the taking of too much wine and to other carnalities. It would surely be entirely impossible to convince him that there were still many thousands of persons, men and women, who deliberately shut themselves up in order to pray and that his son Algy proposed to make one of them. . . . The imagination boggled at the thought of the interview.

So, once more, I escaped into irresponsibility, threw out anchors, so to speak, and wished for the day.

On the twenty-fourth I received a long letter from Algy, recounting his Esher experience and making other remarks. This I prefer not to insert. . . .

I went to town on the morning of the twenty-fifth and drove straight to Dick's house, and the instant I set eyes on him, sunk despairingly in his arm-chair, I knew that things were somehow all wrong. He looked at me hopelessly.

"Where's Chris?" I began.

"He's to meet us at the station, if we really are to go."

I ignored this.

"And Algy?"

"He's dining here this evening."

Dick was in his dramatic mood; I could see that and determined to face it cheerfully.

"Look here, Dick; what's the matter?"

He waved his hands despairingly as I sat down.

"I can't tell you; I can't tell you; that's the worst of it. And I shall burst if I don't."

"If you mean Esher you needn't trouble. I heard from Algy yesterday. . . . Yes, quite full and explicit."

"Thank God!" broke out Dick piously; and sat down too. Then he went on rapidly. "My dear man, that boy's going to be a saint. He's — he's gorgeous. I fear nothing for him. He knows the whole thing now, and he never wavered one second."

"Well then —"

"It's the other one, my dear man; it's the other one."

"You mean Miss Maple?"

"Yes. . . . Well, I went straight to Lady Brasted, with his leave, and told her everything — I mean about his vocation — and told her to pass it on. Wasn't that right?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, of course, it never even entered my head that she wouldn't."

"Do you mean —"

Dick waved his hands again.

"I'm in a frightful state of mind," he cried. "I don't know what to think. All I know is that that girl's been here for instructions again and again, just as usual, that she's gone down to Crowston again and that there's not the faintest sign that she knows anything. I don't believe that woman's told her after all."

"Stuff and nonsense!" I said. "She must have."

"I don't believe it for a minute," cried Dick. "I believe she's trying to force it on more than ever."

"Tell me exactly what happened in the evening," I said judicially.

"Nothing, nothing at all. Miss Maple was all right, and of course I thought that Lady Brasted wasn't going to tell her till after we'd gone. So that didn't disturb me. But Algy! Algy! My dear man, he was absolutely himself again. He took her into dinner, he turned over music for her — Lady B. asked him, by the way — he was perfectly natural. I can't think where that boy gets his self-control from. How in the world he did it is beyond me.

was like a cat on hot plates, inside. But he did it all without a tremor. I never caught him off his guard once. We went off early next morning, and the last thing I saw was that girl waving to us from the porch. She was a bit too serene for my liking, because she must have seen there had been something queer about Algy in the oak-room."

"I understand from Algy that it was just touch-and go," I said slowly.

"Exactly; at least so he thinks, though I'm not sure. . . . Well, the question is, what's to be done?"

"Why didn't you tell her yourself?" I said severely.

Dick groaned.

"I wish to God I had; but I kept hoping and hoping that Lady Brasted had, or would. Then I thought I'd tell her when we'd seen his people, and this morning I got a note to say she couldn't come to-morrow as she was going to Crowston yesterday till Monday."

I sat pondering. These were indeed complications.

"What about her faith?" I asked.

"Oh! she's convinced all right. That's the worst of it in one way. If she was just a hypocrite *I* wouldn't mind. But she's not; there's a lot in her. *I* don't know when I've had a more satisfactory con-

vert. And yet I can't doubt any longer that she's in love with this boy. . . . I've been thinking furiously. . . . She speaks of him now and then. It's all that other woman, you know."

"Tell me more about Algy."

Dick laughed shortly.

"Oh! you needn't bother about him. He's all right. I suppose you do really understand what happened to him that evening?"

"I imagine that he suddenly understood what falling in love meant."

"Exactly; though that's a mild way of putting it. He was just knocked clean off his feet. I've heard of it before; but I've never seen it till then."

"Was it . . . was it, rather ghastly?"

Dick leaned forward.

"My dear," he said, "you and I are priests; Algy isn't. I suppose neither you nor I ever have or ever can possibly understand it. But it was ghastly."

"And he never wavered?" I asked, after a pause.

"Never for one second. He said that God was cruel. I began to tell him that he was blaspheming; then I saw he wasn't. . . . He only meant that God must have everything or nothing — at least from him. . . . Well; he was staying here a night or two last week."

"Yes?"

"Well; I went to his room when he was out to get

a book I'd lent him. I couldn't find it. I began to look among his things. There was a tin box there, one of those round things, you know, that altar-breads are kept in. Well; the top fell off as I moved it. Do you know what was inside?"

I shook my head.

"It was a little discipline that boy had made out of whip-cord and wire."

"Oh! they often do that. It's a regular symptom."

"Yes, I know. But this meant business. I tell you it was all streaked over with blood. That's new, since Esher, I expect."

"Did you say anything to him?"

"Good God! no."

There was a silence. . . . Then I returned abruptly to Miss Maple.

"She can't apostatize, because she isn't a Catholic — Miss Maple, I mean."

"No; but she can draw back . . . and, and break her heart."

I was silent.

"Does she know we're coming down to-day?" I asked presently.

"She's sure to by now. I didn't tell her."

"Why on earth not? It would have been rather a good —"

"My dear man, I just couldn't. . . . I don't

know. Oh, Lord! do let me alone. What a confounded nuisance these women are!"

Dick began to stride about his room, hammering his head in perplexity.

"Come and lunch," I said, with as much tranquillity as I could summon. Things were getting beyond me altogether, and when they do that, I am accustomed to let go and wait.

It was a very dismal meal that we had. Dick was distracted and feverish. I began to wonder whether he was the right man to take with us or not, till I remembered the way in which I had seen him deport himself once or twice before in the presence of difficulties. (Oh! Dick has plenty of breeding. He'll rage on up to the verge of male hysterics when he's with friends; but he'll stiffen into the most proper rigidity when the crisis really arrives. I suppose it's the result of breeding.) But he was at his worst with me that day. He had long fits of staring at the tablecloth, answering me in the voice of one who dreams; he pushed his chair back at the end, forgetting to say grace, and seized a cigarette without offering me one; he also took the most comfortable chair with its back to the light. Finally, he said he didn't think he'd come with us, after all.

"You've got to," I said briefly. (Of course, the

possibility had occurred to me of not going myself.)

"But how can I face that girl?"

"You ass! She won't join the council. No; it's next Wednesday that'll be your crisis."

"What, when she comes for instruction? She won't come. I'll bet you what you like."

I knew nothing about that; and said so.

"I'm in such a tangle," said Dick slowly, "that I really don't see my way out. I wonder . . . oh! I wonder whether we're right. Suppose it doesn't come off. Suppose Algy funks it at the end. . . . Suppose, after all, he's got no vocation! . . . What a vile mess we should have made of it!"

"Dick. That's not our affair. We've got to take things as they come. 'Do ye nexte thynge.' Besides, you know perfectly well he's got a Vocation."

"I suppose you're right," he said, and relapsed into thoughtful gloom.

The train left Victoria at two-thirty-five; and at twenty minutes past the hour we told Betty to beckon up a cab.

It was a heavy November day as we drove through the streets — the kind of a day that either drives one inwards or outwards; either into an understanding of how little man is and how helpless

before Large Mysteries; or of how strong and great he is to have accomplished so much in this world, these enormous buildings, this stupendous city, these labyrinths of rail and steam and streets. Here we were, two small men, in a hansom cab; here about us was London with its huge suggestiveness, its overpowering witness to materialism; and what was beyond it all? Was the whole affair visionary and impossible — this business on which we were bent? Or was it the most supremely real and vital thing? One of the two alternatives was the raving of madness, the other the apotheosis of sane sense. Which was which? . . .

On the strip of pavement outside the booking-office, among the supercilious porters who always at that station lounge about waiting for gentlemen in fur coats on their way to Brighton, to the discomfiture of all less wealthy travelers, stood a bearded figure in a fawn-colored coat, brown boots and a Trilby hat.

"So here you are," he said. "I've got the tickets."

(II)

Harold was at home on an *exeat* from Oxford and had arrived with Miss Maple and Sybil on the previous evening. There was to be shooting next day, for which another man or two were expected,

and Mary and Sybil were come down to entertain them.

Harold was rather cross after lunch, for his darling was still talking in the hall with his mother; and lingering about had seemed useless. So he went to the billiard-room and began to knock the balls about. He had asked for the motor and had been told he couldn't have it.

"It's got to go to the station," said his father.

"Who's coming?"

"Some one to see me."

Mr. Banister looked severe and thought how discreet he was. There was no earthly reason why he should not have announced our coming; but he had not done so except to his wife with an instruction to keep the confidence. I think he thought there was something vaguely disreputable in the fact that three papists were to enter his house. It might almost look as if Popish plots were being successful and as if the defection of his own son were somehow whispering the machinations of the Jesuits, who, as is notorious, are perpetually worming themselves into blameless British households without the smallest motive. He knew that Chris gave himself out to be a layman; but he was not quite satisfied. On the whole, therefore, it seemed to him best to keep the whole affair dark, and to entertain us to conversation and tea in his own study. He still believed, as

we learned presently, that the object of the deputation must be, in some manner, to reinstate Algy.

So Harold was doubly cross. He had failed to get the motor for himself and Sybil, and he had now failed to get Sybil for himself.

He played, then, with that listlessness that means failure. Four times did he venomously hit the balls round the table without accomplishing anything. Once more he set his teeth savagely and was addressing himself to the red, when Mary walked in.

He had not seen her alone since her arrival; but he had noticed, he thought, an unusual air about her. She had been very quiet at dinner on the previous evening, quiet again at breakfast and lunch, and yet she had not seemed at all depressed. There was a kind of radiant tranquillity in her brown eyes that had been rather pleasing when he had had time to notice it. Harold approved of Mary very much, and, as soon as the disappointment that she was not Sybil had subsided, he was conscious of being pleased that she had come.

"Come and knock about," he said.

Mary looked at him an instant as he played his stroke and missed.

"Yes, I will," she said. "I see there's hope for me to-day;" and she chose a cue.

Harold liked playing with Mary, because he knew he could always beat her if he really paid attention;

and yet Mary played well enough to redeem the performance from absurdity.

"Aren't you going out?" she said.

"No; it's beastly. Besides, I've been out this morning. Go on: you begin. Fifty up."

It was very pleasant to watch her. She was so careful and so graceful. She bent her face so deliberately. Her hands were so white and firm. She really wanted to win; she was so genially distressed when she lost, which was three times out of four; she was so completely delighted when she won through Harold's inattention or magnanimity. She gave him exactly that which the young male desires — a competitor competent enough to be worth facing, inferior enough to be secure of beating and pleasant enough to protect. Harold felt a real man when he played at billiards with Mary.

Outside, the day was bleak enough to heighten the pleasure of this warm and secure room. Gusts of wind pattered the laurel leaves together beneath the window, flaws of rain spattered on the glass, the huge cedar on the lawn tossed its well-bred fingers and arms despairingly in the air as a man shrugs his shoulders in disgust, and, beyond, heavy clouds ran continually across the sky.

The two were neck by neck up to forty-two; then Harold ran out, and laid down his cue.

"I wonder where Sybil is," he said inadvertently.

Mary looked at him with sisterly pleasure.

"Oh! Harold," she said, "I do like you."

The boy flushed, brought suddenly down from his manhood, while Mary sat down comfortably in the low, large, pig-skin chair by the fire.

"Shall I tell you something?" she said suddenly.

"All right."

"I don't think I will, then."

Harold affected to whistle, and Mary watched him with pleasure as he took up his cue once more. She knew perfectly well what was in his mind. Then, after an effectual stroke, out it came.

"It isn't anything about Sybil?" he asked, going round the table.

"No — it's about me."

"Oh!"

"I will tell you," said Mary impulsively, "if you'll absolutely swear not to tell a soul."

"All right."

"No; come and sit down. I can't talk while you're doing that."

Harold finished his run (it would never do for the male to show interest in female secrets); tossed his cue on the table; came round and sat opposite her, with his hands in his pockets.

"It's this first," said Mary. "Have you ever

talked to Algy much —" she broke off in some confusion. "No," she said, "it's nothing to do with Algy. . . . Oh! I may as well tell you. . . ."

Again she stopped. Harold eyed her carefully.

"Well; get on," he said.

"I don't think I will," observed Mary very slowly. "At least, not just now. Let us talk about something else."

"What you please," said Harold politely.

"Well — Sybil," she said, determined to switch off the line effectually.

"What's there to say about her?"

"Well; what's she doing this afternoon?"

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"My dear boy," said Mary contentedly, "you needn't take that line with me. I think she's a dear girl; and so do you, you know."

"Oh! she's all right," remarked Harold uncomfortably. Mary had never talked quite like this before; she had never been quite so straightforward, though he knew and she knew and he knew that she knew, and so forth, exactly what the relations were.

"What I want to know is this," said Mary with unusual determination. "What's going to happen?"

"Oh! I don't know," said the boy peevishly. "What's the good of talking?"

"I wish I was of some use in the world," sighed Mary, beginning to drum her bronze shoe on the bear's head at her feet.

"When did you meet Algy last?" asked Harold suddenly.

"About a fortnight ago."

"Oh! where's he going to be for Christmas, do you know?"

"Lady Brasted's going to ask him down," said Mary with a superb unconcern.

"Oh! Are you going to be there?"

"Yes."

"Poor old Algy. Give him my love."

"I will."

Then Harold had a sudden impulse of confidence about himself. He felt cruelly used just now; there was the motor and there was Sybil and there were his debts at Oxford and his father's singularly unsympathetic attitude towards them and a host of things, including the particular state of mind that one gets into in the middle of an afternoon indoors.

"Look here," he said. "Of course, you know all about it. . . . Well, I'm twenty-one next year; I shall then have three hundred pounds a year of my own. I ask you, what's a man to do with that?"

"Save it for five years," said Mary.

"Fifteen hundred pounds! Besides, I can't starve meantime. And there are some debts."

"Go into an office."

"I couldn't possibly. And even then — Oh! it's hopeless."

"Hasn't she got anything?"

"Not a penny piece. . . . Well, I suppose about fourpence."

He relapsed into silence again, eying only the little shoe that tapped and tapped. It was a cruel situation. Here was this ass Algy, certainly dreeing his weird just now (but, then, that was entirely his own fault), but with unlimited prospects to look forward to — to Crowston, to an adequate income, to comparative liberty. And he didn't in the least deserve it or appreciate it. Harold felt filled with sudden vindictiveness.

"And there's that fool Algy," he said, "with his rotten religion —"

The foot stopped tapping very suddenly; and he looked up.

"Well?" he said.

"Don't abuse Algy's religion," said the girl quietly.

"Why not? Nobody but a fool —"

"Please don't," she said again.

The panting of a motor suddenly became audible from the direction of the drive, sounding through the open door of the billiard-room that gave upon one of the hall passages. From where Harold sat

he could see through that door, along the passage and through the window beyond to the front of the house.

"Here's the motor," he said, suddenly distracted. "I wonder who the chap is. . . . Good Lord! there are three of them, and two of them are parsons."

"Parsons?"

"They look like it. What on earth does father want with two parsons? I hate parsons. That's a fat one!"

Mary got up out of her chair and came across, looking too. Then she suddenly appeared to freeze. She remained perfectly still, half turned away from the boy, with one hand on the billiard table.

"What's up?" said Harold, startled by her attitude.

Mary took a step towards the door; then, as the three disappeared within the Corinthian portico she turned round. Her face was strangely set, and there was an odd light in her eyes. Still she did not speak.

"What's up?" asked Harold again. "Do you know any of them?"

"I know one of them," said Mary; "they're priests."

"Priests!"

Then Mary was gone.

(III)

Harold too got up a moment later and went after her, but she had disappeared. This was really exciting. Visions of plots and conversions moved before his brain. He had a wild picture, as he tiptoed along towards the hall, of his father going through strange rites in his study, from which he too should emerge a Catholic. Surely it must be news of Algy! Perhaps he was dead! One violent emotion tore through his heart as he perceived what this meant to himself. Then he beat it down; for he was a good-hearted boy on the whole.

The hall was empty, but on the oak-table in the center there lay three hats; a silk one, a Trilby, and a wide-awake. He inspected them curiously. They seemed very suggestive. There was a stick, too, on the table, with a silver band around it; he looked at that too and read the initials "C. D." Priests!

The door from the inner hall opened, and a charming face peered in.

"Come here," hissed Harold melodramatically.

Sybil stepped in like a dainty cat.

"Who do you suppose these belong to?" whispered the boy indicating the hats.

She shook her head silently, looking at him with expectant eyes. (Oh! she was charming!)

"Two Popish priests," hissed Harold once more,

"and they've now gone to father to make him a Catholic. Don't you smell the incense?"

"What *do* you mean?"

"I swear they're priests."

"How do you know?"

"Mary told me so. She knows one of them, she said."

Sybil stared at him.

"I passed her on the stairs just now. She was going to your mother's room."

The two regarded one another.

"Come along to the billiard-room," said Harold suddenly. "We must beat the bottom out of this."

There they sat down again on two chairs, on either side of the fire-place, leaving the door open as before, in case the mysterious strangers should come out again. But the motor had gone off to the stables, and there appeared no hope of seeing them again for the present. It was quite like the situation at Esher, with other actors.

"By George!" began Harold. "Something's up."

Sybil nodded mutely. She was sitting where Mary had sat just now, and he could not help contrasting one with the other. Certainly Mary had looked very young just now; but with Sybil now instead —!

What Mary had said of her a while ago was singularly true, thought Harold. She was like a Gainsborough — exactly like one; with an extraordinary suggestiveness of youth and breeding and daintiness, with large gray eyes and red mouth; and she would, as Mary had said, look more and more like a French marquise every year she lived.

The sun was beginning to go down beyond the windows in a cheerful glory, breaking out beneath the arched clouds, and the ruddy light shone its level rays straight in upon that picture opposite the boy, turning the girl's dark hair to threads of gold, charging her face with radiance and her eyes with light.

Harold broke off in the midst of an argument to the effect that Algy must have been offered an important post at a foreign court, probably by the Jesuits —"

"Good Lord!" he cried.

Then he was down on his knees at her feet, seizing her slender hands and kissing them furiously.

"My darling!" he cried.

Oh! he had kissed her before, shyly and suddenly in shrubberies and dark rooms; but never with this passion. It was the whole thing that inspired him — the vivid hope that would assert itself that in some way or another the visit of the priests would mean wealth to himself. No, no, his heart cried to

him. Algy was not dead! he could not be dead! Poor old Algy! And, on the other, there was that vague hope that would not be stifled, that in some way or another the situation would be changed for the better. Harold had been so constant and so very proud of it! Surely things would turn. Above all, there sat Sybil in an entrancing light.

Sybil too knew the difference between this kissing and the other ones. The dear face on her hands shook with passion; the lips stung.

"Let me go," she cried breathlessly, ashamed and frightened.

It was a minute or two before she could tear him off, and stood up, trembling and white.

"Oh! my darling! I'm so sorry," cried Harold. "I couldn't help it. I simply couldn't help it. You looked so sweet!"

He was still on his knees with his bright hair all ruffled, and his ardent eyes alight with love.

"You must never touch me like that again," she whispered, still half terrified.

"I won't! I swear I won't," cried the boy. "Oh! Sybil. . . ."

The two were in their chairs again presently, with a full yard and a half between them. No indiscreet footman coming noiselessly to mend the fire would have had a word to say when he got back to the pan-

try. But Sybil was conscious that yet one more stage had been passed.

How it was all to end she had no more idea than Harold. For herself she could not conceive that three hundred pounds a year would not be ample for all needs, particularly with what Harold had called her own "fourpence," but elder persons had been so superior upon the subject that she had given up saying so. She had often got at opinions in the most artless manner and from the most unlikely people — opinions as to the cost of houses and the upkeep of a garden; and it seemed to her always that three hundred pounds a year meant wealth. Still, she said so no more.

The afternoon closed in as they sat there, discussing the significance of the visit of the three men.

CHAPTER V

SOMETHING of the same despair that had visited Algy on a previous occasion, fell upon us three as we approached Crowston. In the train we had been comparatively cheerful and had decided upon our plan of action. It would be best, we agreed, that Chris should do most of the talking; he was so very Lay, that it seemed probable he would be more effective with the country gentlemen than avowed priests could ever be; and Chris had sketched generally what he proposed to say and at what points we should support him.

I said one word to him on recent events. "You have heard about Esher?"

He nodded.

But from the moment we entered the motor, even Chris became a little depressed, and by the time that we were spinning through the park, he sat silent altogether. For a well-padded motor and an English park are perhaps, above all else, the two things most calculated to induce a materialistic frame of mind. They are so supremely comfortable, so adequate to lower needs, so entirely representative of imagination fettered to the requirements of the body.

How hardly shall they who have motors and parks —! Past Dick's rather large head I saw woods and bracken slip noiselessly by, and I knew that every branch was, so to speak, named and numbered. I saw a few anxious rabbits see-sawing back to their holes in the autumn light and knew that these too were the private possession of the man we were coming to see — his little incarnate interests. And the errand on which we came was to the effect that his son proposed to relinquish all rights to these things and all that they stood for and to devote himself to praising God. It was grotesque.

I gained a certain consolation from Chris's presence beside me. Though he was silent, I knew that there was in him no thought of wavering. To a stranger nothing could appear more completely secular and conventional than this trim, well-dressed man, with his little pointed beard, and well-blacked boots, and trousers with a crease down the front; and yet I, who had known him now for ten years, understood that beneath that exterior lay what was perhaps the most remarkable character of my acquaintance — a man who looked on the world from an angle that very few persons have reached. It reassured me to feel him there.

The house was one more weight upon my soul. It was so very large and square and heavy. Through the dining-room windows I caught a

glimpse of a table laid with linen and silver, gleaming and dancing in the rich firelight. Above rose the tiers of windows, very Grecian and solid. Then, as the motor slackened and stopped, there was the porch and a stout butler.

We took off our coats in the silent and leisurely hall. There were horns all round it and pikes above the line of wigged and be-jeweled portraits. And there a large wood fire burned in the chimney. As I followed Dick through the baize door on the left, I heard another door open behind me and, turning, caught a glimpse of a girl's face. But I was not absolutely certain who she was. We went on through the ante-room and found ourselves in the library.

"Mr. Banister will be with you immediately, sir," said the butler.

This room was really the climax of all. It had a high, fine ceiling, heavily corniced. Between the three windows stood two tall book-cases, grated with brass wire. It was plain that they were never opened; and it was those that gave the room the dignity of a library. I conjectured to myself that they contained volumes of early Victorian divinity and travel. (Algy, a little later, informed me with genial laughter that I was right.) The rest of the room was furnished with sporting engravings heavily framed, low, leather-fringed book-cases ill-filled with

bound numbers of magazines and the series called "Badminton," gun-cases, mahogany tables and chairs and large metal boxes. The Turkey carpet was deep and noiseless. A sober red fire seemed to meditate to itself in the hearth beyond the brass fender, and a couple of green-shaded lamps stood upon tables, though the sun was not yet gone down.

I am a strong believer in the significance of rooms; and this, in which I found myself, corroborated exactly all that I knew of Algy's father. The motor, the park, the Corinthian porch and the two rooms through which we had passed had been like a crescendo of music leading to this climax; and I found the climax worthy of its introduction.

Dick was looking at a photograph on the yellow marble mantlepiece, with that furtive eagerness that we all show in a strange house.

"Theo," he said.

I went and looked at it too. Yes, it was surely Theo. It was a stoutish young man in a militia uniform, with a smooth, childish face on which there was less expression than is conceivable on a human countenance. It was the face of a perfectly contented animal. He held his sword trappings gathered up in his left hand. There is really no more to be said about it. Yet it fascinated me.

It seemed to me extraordinarily pathetic. Here was the model son, deceased, the pattern of what this

old man wished his sons to be; and here were we, three Papists, come to announce that another of his sons, the successor of this militia young man, who should have followed in his brother's square-planted footsteps, intended to take up a life that would appear to his father as nothing else than one of wicked insanity. And yet we were quite certain . . . and so was he. . . .

Chris was standing a little apart from us, upon the hearth-rug, a reassuring figure enough to a secularly minded man; yet it was from his lips that the cruel news was to fall. He was staring down now into the fire, self-contained and thoughtful. He looked up suddenly.

"Remember, Dick, you begin. Then bring me in, and I'll take it up."

"You'll do as you said in the train?" I asked.

"Of course. I shan't meet him on the lower ground until he's had his chance."

And so we waited.

Again and again I tried to represent to my own imagination what would be likely to pass through the mind of the old man; and again and again I failed. I could conjecture nothing except blind revōlt and bewilderment. I understood perfectly how he would loathe it — why, every arrangement my eyes fell upon in the room told me that. He would

honestly believe that his son was about to degrade himself below the level of a man, that he proposed, in his wild insanity, to practice a self-mutilation with regard to all for which he was created and endowed more fantastic and far more inexcusable than the morbidities of a pagan. That a Banister should become a Catholic was a heavy enough blow, that he should become a priest was worse, that he should become a Contemplative monk was intolerable.

I will not deny that once and again in those moments of waiting the bitter doubt surged up as to whether we were not all wrong together, as to whether it were not Algy's place after all to remain here, to shoot birds, to marry a wife, to beget children and to put on weight; but I am pleased to think, looking back on it all, that I treated the thought as the faithlessness that it was. For I remembered our conversations, Algy's revelations of himself, the incidents that took place at St. Hugh's, at Amplefield and elsewhere — above all that amazing little incident at Esher, when, for the first time in his life a man's passion had rushed upon him, fully-armed, and he had vanquished it. There was no question that he had vanquished it; his recovery in Dick's presence, like the recoil of a spring, his sane, steady, ardent letter to me three weeks later. Why, the thing was plain. He had met his adversary *once*, face to face; and the rest of his life was to

be a deliberate conflict. I thought of all these things — in fact, of all that strange and mystical process of events by which a soul climbs to the light, that history of an inner life at the time as bewildering as a jumbled puzzle, afterwards as convincing as the same puzzle set in order.

There was a vibration somewhere; then a heavy footstep on the strip of uncarpeted board outside the door. Then the handle turned, and a tall old man in a dark Norfolk suit came forward into the room.

Hostility is as indefinable as love and as unmistakable; and here was hostility in every line and feature. Oh! he was courteous; he made a little stiff bow to each of us, though he did not take our hands; he saw us seated, before he took his own place in the chair to the right of the fire — the chair, no doubt, from which he conducted all his less formal business; he said a few proper words as to the inclemency of the day and his hopes as to our comfort coming up; he even thanked us (though hostility blazed again beneath his courteous words) for the interest we took in his son and for the trouble to which we were putting ourselves on his behalf. It was an admirable display of the suspicious Englishman dominated by the gentleman, and the fatuous well-bred dignity of it all brought a lump to my throat.

"I understand, gentlemen, that you have news to give me of my son?"

"It is very kind of you to receive us, sir," began Dick; but the old man waved that away.

"I could do nothing else," he said. "I shall be very much obliged —"

"It was I who received him into the church, I must tell you," went on Dick, a little hurriedly. "I don't at all want to conceal that."

The hostility in the other's arching eyes seemed to concentrate itself into two gleaming points, and I saw his lips tighten beneath his gray mustache.

"But it is Mr. Dell here," continued Dick, "who has had most to do with him since."

Mr. Banister made the faintest inclination towards Chris. Chris lifted his chin from his hand; he was sitting directly opposite our host, with us two priests between.

"You won't think me impudent, I hope," he said in his distinct well-bred voice, "if I tell you how fond I am of him, and what a fine —" He broke off suddenly. "Well, this is not the point. Here is our news in a sentence. Your son has asked us to tell you that he wishes to go into a monastery."

There fell an absolute silence. I had no idea that Chris meant to bring it out like that, and I do not think that he had so meant, until that moment. I looked at him nervously; he was sitting bolt upright,

his chin a little tilted; and there was not in his appearance the faintest sign of that inexplicable shame in which I myself struggled. Dick drew a long breath and remained still, staring at the hearth-rug. Mr. Banister too, remained still, petrified.

Chris's voice went on; it had a strange little ring in it.

"I have no doubt this sounds horrible to you, sir. I am very sorry for that; but I cannot help it. May I say a word or two before telling you what it all means?"

There was no answer or movement. Chris went on immediately.

"Please remember this, Mr. Banister, though I am afraid it may not be of much comfort. These gentlemen here asked me to speak in their name — I am a layman, you see. . . . Well, please remember that though, in the opinion of Englishmen, at the present time, to become a monk means to become a fool, if not a knave, it was not always so; nor is it so considered in other countries by those who have kept what was once the Faith of all Christendom. . . . I know you think them all terribly mistaken; but I ask you to make allowances and to remember that Christians who think as you do are in a very considerable minority, even at the present day. There is not one good Catholic—"

He broke off suddenly, eying the old man. We were in the thick of it, with a vengeance.

Mr. Banister had moved in his seat. As I remember now the look on his face, I think I may say that I have never in my life seen such an admirable example of self-control. There was loathing there — such a loathing as that with which a man looks upon a piece of mean treachery or a disgusting outrage — there was anger fierce as fire and there was torturing bewilderment; and yet these three passions were held down and restrained by that slender thing which we call breeding. His face worked a little; but he was master of himself; and though his voice shook, it was neither broken nor passionate.

"Tell me what it means, sir."

Chris, without moving a muscle, raised his voice a little, not to the note of defiance, but to what I may call a proclamatory tone. His words may be considered by some — bad form; but I did not find them so.

"It means this, Mr. Banister — that your son has been asked by God, if we are right, to the highest position that a human soul can reach on earth; that he has been called, as our Saviour said, to forsake father and mother and lands and wife and children and to become a crucified disciple of a crucified Lord. . . . Yes, you dispute all that; I know it. I do

not ask you to believe it. But we do ask you to believe that your son believes it. That is something to be proud of, surely! You would be proud of your son if he died for his country. I ask you to be proud of him for even wishing to die for God. You would be proud even if he died for a mistake; so long as he did so willingly and gallantly. Of course you would be grieved, as you are grieved now; but there is something stronger than grief. . . . Even if all this was a mistake too, if we were all wrong in our religion and you were right — well, even then you should be proud."

Chris was splendid. I shook to hear him. When I looked again for an instant at the father, I was shocked at the change in his face; and yet still there was nothing but to admire. But his ruddy color had turned almost to ashes; and the lines were terribly deep. He swallowed once in his throat.

"Tell me what it means," he said again, in that trembling voice.

"I have told you, sir; it means that your son says good-bye to the world as he knows it; that he leaves everything except God; that he gives himself up to prayer. He will not be a preacher, though he will be a priest. There will be nothing at all for you to be proud of in him, in the ordinary way. The world will never hear of him again, even when he dies. But it is for what comes after death that he will do

all this. . . . Of course we may be wrong; it may be a mistake that he is making in attempting this life at all; in that case he will not live it. But we do not think that it is; that is why I have spoken so plainly. These two priests, as well as one or two others who have been consulted, are confident that he is right."

Mr. Banister moved a little in his red-leather chair; he put one gaitered foot over the other. Then he struck the first regrettable note.

"I suppose you will say, sir, that he has not been persuaded."

Chris flashed back like a rapier.

"On the contrary, I say that he has to a large extent. Personally I have done my utmost — as soon as I saw what was in his mind."

Mr. Banister uttered a little sound. The answer took him plainly by surprise; and it was then that I saw clearly that Chris's appeal had failed. I suppose it meant nothing to him at all; it was the talk of a Catholic — that was all — to be put aside like any other professional jargon. Chris saw it too, for his teeth closed, and a little hollow came out at the cheek nearest to me; his eyes were bright as sparks. But he made another effort.

"Mr. Banister, I beg of you not to misunderstand us. Would you yourself try to persuade your son to *do* what you thought right, if you saw him hesitat-

ing? Surely you have done so already! I cannot imagine your not having done so. In that sense, and in that sense only have we — have I tried to persuade him. . . . May I tell you again what we are asking? It is this. We do not ask you to believe that your son is right, but only that he is sincere. He will come down here the moment you ask him. . . . We can take back a letter this evening, if you wish, and he will be with you to-morrow. He will remain here as long as you like, to talk things over. I am quite sure that if you will tell him all that is in your mind, he will tell you all that is in his; and I am quite sure too, that you will find him entirely sincere. Please bear in mind that he has nothing in the world to gain by doing what he intends — in fact, everything to lose."

The old man's head had sunk forward a little on his neck. I could see that Chris had made no impression at all. There was an uncomfortable suggestiveness in his look. He was more master of himself than ever; but it was what theologians call a *vitiosa victoria*. . . . he had conquered one passion by another.

When Chris ended there was a little silence. I counted seven ticks on the delicate black marble clock on the mantelpiece. Then Mr. Banister began to speak.

"You have said what you have to say, Mr. . . . Mr. Dell; I have heard everything. Now I must speak. The boy wants to become a monk. . . . I . . . I had feared that. . . . I was almost prepared to hear that. When he became a . . a Catholic I feared that. . . . And now you must let me speak."

His lips mumbled together a little; and I began to prepare myself for a storm. I saw that he had been able to restrain himself up to now, partly because the shock was so severe. Now he had time to recover; and we should have news of it. Then it burst out.

"I . . . I can find no words to use strong enough, gentlemen. I could not have believed it! I have often heard that Catholics did such things; but I have never come across a case before. . . ." (He was upright again now in his chair; and his eyes blazed.) "Here you three gentlemen, all middle-aged and experienced, have set yourselves to persuade my boy to become a monk . . . you have talked him round . . . of course you have; you tell me so yourselves. You have not become monks yourselves . . . no, no; all that fine life which you say I ought to be proud of for my boy's sake, that is not for you. But instead you have set yourself to talk my boy over. He's the eldest son . . . you know that . . . you

know all about the entail, I'll be bound. Can you look me in the face, gentlemen, and say that you do not?"

He paused an instant.

"We know all about the entail, Mr. Banister," came Chris's level voice.

"Yes, you know all about that," exulted Mr. Banister, "and so you have set yourself to persuade my boy to become a monk." (His voice rose higher; he gripped the arms of his chair.) "Now I tell you this, gentlemen; and you may take it from me. I do not mind saying these things to you even though you are my guests for a time. You must take the consequences of coming at all on such an errand. It is this that I have to say. You shall not have what you want. It shall be stopped if there is justice in England. I shall write to my solicitors. All England shall hear of it. There shall be questions asked in the Houses of Parliament. Things like this are not so easily done nowadays. And as for you, gentlemen, who have tried to work this trick, I have no words that I can use. You have come down here trying to get me to take it quietly! Well, I will not take it quietly. It is an outrage. You have my answer, gentlemen. If you have no more to say, I will ask you to leave my house."

He sprang to his feet and stood there, a fine stalwart old man, a monument of splendid wrath and

straightforwardness. And yet, though I shook with anger myself, I saw the pathos of the thing. It was so gallant and so stupid. I wondered whether we had been right in approaching him like this at all. Five minutes hence —!

Then Chris's voice broke in again, level and low.

"May I ask you to give us a few minutes more, Mr. Banister? We have not nearly done yet."

"I see no need."

"We have more to say, sir. A great deal more. Please sit down again, if you will be so kind."

The old man did not move.

I looked across at Chris. He too was as pale as ashes now; it was as if he were the culprit; and yet his voice was completely under his control. I looked at Dick; and there I saw a model of depressed patience; he was still staring moodily at the hearth-rug; but I could see that he was meditating a remark. Then out it came, abruptly.

"You have said some very sharp things, Mr. Banister. It is only right that you should hear what we have to say in our defense." (His voice suddenly became peremptory.) "May we ask you once more to sit down?"

Mr. Banister sat down.

"Now Chris," said Dick.

Chris drew a long breath; lifted his eyes once to

the old man's face, then fixed them on the fire and began again.

"First," he said, "as to your remark about our not being monks. I am afraid I shall never make you believe that we are sincere in the lives we live, and that all of us would be monks if we thought Almighty God desired it. Perhaps it may make some difference to your opinion if I tell you that I myself have done my best to be one — that I lived the life for eight months. . . ." He paused to let that sink in; then he added; "I only left then because I was told I had no — that I should never be happy there. However, it isn't our point now to justify ourselves."

Chris leaned back; and I saw that the old man was watching him, though he said nothing.

"Now as to your second point," went on Chris; "let us get that quite clear. I understand that you think that, in accordance with our reputation, we have overpersuaded your son to become a monk, in order to get this property into our hands, that we knew all about the entail and so on, and have hoped that the Church would finally get at any rate the greater part of your property, in the event of your death. Is that right?"

He glanced up; as Mr. Banister nodded curtly.

"Now I am extraordinarily sorry you thought that. It is rather — er — elementary. Frankly, I

hoped you wouldn't at any rate say so outright without proof. . . . Well, I was wrong. It only remains for me to put you right."

Chris deliberately unbuttoned his coat and drew out of his breast-pocket a letter; then, still holding it, he went on.

"Here is a letter your son gave me to give to you, if by any chance you did make that accusation. I will leave it with you when I go. But I will tell you the purport of it now. It is this. Your son renounces all claim to the property, in the event of his becoming professed as a monk; he states in this letter his willingness to sign any legal documents that may be necessary for that end; he suggests to you that you should make over to him an annuity until his death of one hundred and twenty pounds a year, so that he shall not be an actual burden upon his brethen in Religion; but he leaves that entirely to you. Should you decline to do this, my friend here, Monsignor Yolland, who is a man of considerable wealth, has undertaken to pay your son that annuity himself. . . . I think, Mr. Banister, if you will kindly consider these points, you will think it only right to withdraw the accusation you have just made."

Then Chris leaned forward and delivered his last thrust with extreme deliberation, pausing between *his* sentences.

" Please understand what this means. . . . It means that this place will remain in Protestant hands — in your younger son's hands, instead of in Catholic hands. . . . Do you not think that a good arrangement, Mr. Banister, from your point of view? "

Still, without looking at the old man, Chris rose out of his chair high enough to prop the letter on the mantelpiece, and sat down again. Then I too, looked at Mr. Banister.

I do not think I have ever seen a man more astonished. The hostility was still in his face, but it was blended with amazement. His old lips were parted, and he was staring straight at Chris. I once saw a man fall heavily off a bicycle, and as I ran to pick him up he looked at me with just that expression. I do not believe that even so Mr. Banister understood all that was implied; he only perceived that somehow the tables were turned. But he said nothing.

Chris, after one look, had dropped his eyes again. Then he went on quietly.

" Think over it a little, sir. I do not believe you will be hard upon your son when you see what all this means. It will be just as if he had died. I don't know how the things are arranged; perhaps a deed of gift will be necessary — or whatever it is called. In any case, as I say, it will be as if he had

died. Your younger son, of whom he has told me, will inherit everything. It will be a few years before the final profession takes place in any case; so that there is no hurry. All your son asks of you now is leave to come down here again for a month or so until his reception can be arranged, to . . . to say good-bye. The Prior of the Carthusians — which is the order your son wishes to enter — has consented, provisionally, to receive him soon after Christmas. I may say he has the highest opinion of your son."

Chris was talking on, I could see, rather more verbosely than was necessary, in order to let the other have time to take in the situation. Already the old man was beginning to do so; he shifted his position a little; he passed his hand over his mouth once or twice. Then he spoke; and his voice shook.

"This . . . all this . . . makes a difference, gentlemen. . . . I . . . I do not think I quite understand. . . . You . . you must give me time. . . ."

"Of course," said Chris genially, "I was afraid the whole thing would be a shock. But you will understand presently. May I just tell you again."

Once more, quite slowly and deliberately, Chris enumerated the points of Algy's letter; and once more he explained that all claim to the property was to be given up, that the question of annuity was

left entirely to Mr. Banister's discretion and that Harold would inherit.

I could see the old man almost step by step reconstructing his ideas. He showed it by his face and movements. His features resettled themselves, his lips moved a little in a kind of remorseness and the hostility, though not the suspicion, began to die out of his face. Once he made a motion towards the letter that rested, conspicuously white, at the foot of a bronze nymph upon the mantelpiece; and, as Chris half-rose to give it to him, he motioned him back once more. When Chris finished, the other was himself again.

"I . . . I thank you very much, Mr. Dell. It is all very bewildering still to me. But . . . but I think it is clear enough. I understand you to say that there is to be no claim upon the property at all?"

"Just so."

"Then . . . then, gentlemen, I must confess I was wrong in my suspicions. . . . I. . . . beg to express my regret for what I said. . . . And . . . and my younger son will inherit?"

"Exactly."

Mr. Banister stood up; and we rose with him. He took the letter from the mantelpiece. His hand shook violently.

"This is all very surprising to me, gentlemen.

Of course — of course there will be no trouble about the annuity. . . . But . . . but you must give me a little time. . . . I must talk with my wife. She will be very much grieved of course, as I am myself at your news; but I must confess that all this makes a considerable difference. . . . Will you excuse me, gentlemen, for a few minutes. I will speak with her now. . . ." He glanced at the clock. "You have still an hour, I think. Will you excuse me?"

He hurried from the room.

(III)

The victory was won; that was certain. And yet I was conscious of a disagreeable sensation. It may sound priggish to say so, and yet it is a fact that one is always rather disappointed when a human being takes with alacrity a lower ground than he need. This Mr. Banister had emphatically done. If he had continued to insult us I should have wondered less. But his change from righteous indignation to incoherent complacency was an unpleasant argument on the cynic's side. It seemed that the property was what mattered — nothing else.

"I told you so," I said, rather gloomily to Chris.

Chris smiled pleasantly.

"My dear man, you were quite right and I was wrong. He had his chance, though, didn't he?"

"Oh! certainly he had his chance."

"I think it's a beastly shame," said Dick. "The whole thing took him by surprise."

Chris smiled again.

"Oh! I've no doubt he'd have been able to arrange his emotions better if he'd had time; but — Well, it doesn't matter."

"He'll give Algy a good send-off," I said rather drearily.

As we stood waiting there for the old man's return, once more I began to meditate. I saw very plainly what would happen. Opposition was dead; that is to say real opposition; though, of course, it was plain that the whole thing was not exactly to Mr. Banister's mind. But I saw that there would be no more real trouble. Algy would come down here in a few days, his father would meet him with chastened affection, would treat him as a spiritual invalid who needed humoring and would despatch him at last, sufficiently cheerfully, to St. Hugh's. Then he would settle down again to what was to him the real business of life, to which all other considerations were secondary, to the cultivation of the Banister Family and Estate. Dear me! What a deal of Conventionalism there was in the world.

I looked at Dick.

"Well?" I said.

Dick groaned softly.

"Yes; and now for the girl," he said.

I had completely forgotten Miss Maple. Then I remembered the girl's face I had seen for one instant look through the hall-door.

"And she's here?" I said. "You're certain?"

He nodded.

That set me off again, and I sat down this time to consider myself, watching Dick fingering Theo's photograph and Chris, his head in his hands, leaning forward as his manner was, over the mantelpiece. We looked singularly unlike victors, I thought. Then, as I still meditated, there came the footsteps again, and the old man came in, grave, yet with suppressed radiance in his face.

"My wife thinks as I do," he said abruptly. "though it is a great shock, of course. But she would like to see you, gentlemen. Will you come this way?"

We rose and went after him. We passed through the ante-room, hearing as we did so the clink of tea-things from the hall opposite, and then turned aside through another door which the old man had open for us, and I, at any rate, as I came through, saw that something was going to happen.

It was that same room in which Algy had made his announcement a few months ago; but it was shuttered now and curtained. An ample woman sat upon the sofa opposite, beside the fire, with Algy's

letter open in her lap, and behind her stood a girl, and, after one glance at the old lady, I saw that it was not in her that the storm center lay; though during the following interview I kept my eyes chiefly upon Mrs. Banister, yet my whole attention was given to the other.

How hard it is to describe an interior crisis which one witnesses in another person! Let me first give an account of Miss Maple, as I saw her now for the first time. I need not say that Dick's swiftly indrawn breath behind me as he set eyes on her was not necessary for telling me who she was.

She was tallish and of an excellent figure, rounded and very upright, carrying her head superbly; she was in some softly brown dress with lace at throat and wrists; her hair was abundant and of a fine brown-gold. Her face I despair of describing; it was as a set mask; the features were good, with resolute eyes and mouth. There she stood for an instant; then she sat down abruptly, still behind the sofa, leaning one arm on the table, yet in such a way that her face was still visible in the soft lamplight. She kept her eyes for the most part on Dick, though she glanced two or three times at Chris and myself. There were no introductions beyond a hasty enumeration of our names; Mr. Banister was too much excited for more.

Then he took up his position on the hearthrug,

We sat down opposite his wife.

Now for the conversation that took place. Indeed I can hardly remember it. Algy was no longer the point of interest for me. Briefly, I remember, Mr. Banister touched on our message and asked Chris to repeat himself. This he did; I remember hearing the arguments enumerated, the description of Algy's resolution, his proposals and the general result that Crowston would pass to Harold. Mrs. Banister gave utterance to little sounds now and again. This went on, with question and answer, for, I suppose, about a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes.

But the real point, as I have said, lay in the girl behind the sofa. It is simply impossible to say how I knew what I knew; it was enough that I knew it; and, as I learned afterwards, Dick and Chris knew it also. The marvel was that the excited old couple did not; for the girl's atmosphere was as eloquent as a speech. There are deafnesses other than physical.

For this atmosphere dominated everything for me. Miss Maple's personality must be an unusually strong one, for I do not think that one of us three for the time that we were in that room considered Algy more than a secondary figure in the situation; his intentions and actions seemed, to me at least, only of interest so far as they affected this girl. As for the parents, they became simply nonentities. How

can I express this? . . . It was as when Duse comes on the stage.

The whole thing became horrible. I remembered that I had doubted as to whether she loved Algy, and I wondered at myself. Other things, no doubt, conspired to give driving-force to her central passion; she was getting on in years; her nature demanded luxury; it is peculiarly distressing to be thwarted twice. But these things were not the point. The point was that she had come to understand Algy, considered by most of his friends the fool of the family, whom she herself had once despised as an uncouth schoolboy, as indeed he had been. But now — well these things are not the business of a priest, except so far as they affect his duties. But I assure you that it was no longer grotesque that she should love this boy; the power that goes to make a Contemplative is a remarkable thing.

. . . I glanced up at her again.

She was perfectly motionless. Her cheek rested on her hand and her eyes were fixed on Chris, who talked. Her face was briefly in the shaded light, yet I could make it out. Then those eyes moved to mine; and I looked away. I felt entirely contemptible.

I had not an idea what she would do; and I knew that no human being could prevent a catastrophe if she chose to precipitate it. She might say every-

thing outright in a minute or two; or she might say something, or she might say nothing. That was her affair. We could only wait and see. Dick was motionless and speechless, and I was not surprised.

Once Mr. Banister turned to him.

"You saw him last week, you told me?"

"I saw him last week," repeated Dick heavily, with his eyes cast down; and that was the only sentence he uttered.

Chris did the rest of the talking, with the exception of one or two remarks which I had to make in answer to a direct question, and he did it marvelously well. His nerve was astonishing, for he knew even more pungently than we did the acute crisis which hung over us. At every moment, he told me afterwards, he expected the crash. One word too much, one instant yielding on the part of the girl's will, and we should be in the midst of an unforgettable scene. But the moments went by, and so far there was outward peace. The two old folk talked and questioned, he with an excited complacency that threw off more and more of the disguise of verbal regrets he still attempted to retain, she with a certain tremulousness and bewilderment that was more creditable. Oh! these people were terrible conventionalists after all. Nothing really mattered to them but the standard by which they had always lived; they did not care about Algy, they cared only

about Banister. It was grievous that a Banister should turn Papist and monk; but it would be infinitely more grievous if a Papist Banister should inherit Crowston. They still talked of the necessity of consideration, but it was a conventional phrase, no more. I perceived more and more plainly that the thought of Harold's succession drowned all else in its blaze of glory. Even the grimness of the situation could not hinder a certain faint amusement in my mind at the thought of Chris's appeal just now on the higher ground. These people cared nothing for Algy; it was Banister they adored. And as for this girl's agony, they were not even aware of it.

Towards the end this came out clearly, and with it came the climax, as a wave that hangs suspended above a gulf.

The old man turned abruptly to the girl.

"Well, Miss Mary," he said genially; "and what is your opinion?"

There was an instant's dead silence. I lost my head completely. I perceived only that the girl would have to speak, and with that speaking would come the crash. Her voice at least must betray her, and then she would betray herself; for she had seen during the talk her last rays of hope die.

The atmosphere grew tense and electric, tenfold more than before. Even Mrs. Banister moved her head uneasily. I saw the girl, her face gone su

denly white as paper, lift her cheek from her hand. I heard Dick draw a slow whistling breath.

"Well, Miss Mary?" came the sturdy old voice again.

Then Chris recovered himself. It was like a Divine Interposition. It was rude, of course, but we had done with such considerations now, and his tone made it as little rude as possible. He interrupted —

"We're to see Algy to-night," he said to the old man, "and we want, if you will allow us, to take some definite message. . . ."

I heard no more. I saw the girl's face flush to scarlet and her half-opened lips close and her hand pass over her eyes.

"Well, well," said the old man. "I don't want to be hard on the boy . . ."

He stopped, and looked at his watch irresolutely.

"We will have a word again before you go," he said, "but we must have a cup of tea now."

As we passed out to the hall, where Harold and Sybil were waiting, I could not forbear from one glance backwards. The girl was standing now, motionless and erect, looking after us; and the sight of her hurt me like a knife. Yet, for the first and last time in my life I blessed God for His gift of Conventionalism. It had saved three persons that afternoon from irremediable disaster.

EPILOGUE

IT was in the following July that I went down again to Crowston to take news of Algy. Mrs. Banister herself invited me to do so. I had stayed the previous night at St. Hugh's, on purpose to make a first-hand report. Let me describe first what I saw there, for it was not in the least the same thing that I had described to the Banisters.

I stayed the night in the guest-house, not seeing Algy that night at all, except in such disguise that I did not know him. I only watched from the high west gallery of the church that strange leisurely procession of white figures, hooded and hidden, pass in beneath me, each bearing his lantern; and, after that two hours' deliberate ceremony of the night-office, in the depth of the summer night, hearing the sonorous rolling psalmody rock like a ship in the high nave, I watched that same leisurely and steadfast procession of princes come out. But of his face I caught no glimpse.

Then, on the next morning after breakfast, I was taken to the parlor, where a year ago, in shy bewilderment, we four had stood together.

He *came in* presently, very naturally, smiling, in

his heavy white habit, newly shaved on cheeks and head, looking strangely ageless and remote; and I saw after a minute's conversation that that inexplicable veil, hanging always between the inner and the outer, was fallen between us. The experience at Esher had turned the boy into a man; but it was more than manhood that had come to him here. It was as was said long ago, "Touch me not. . . ."

(Is this exaggerated? I think it will not seem so to any who have talked with enclosed Religious. I am aware that this book is written with all the odds against it; it deals with a hero who only comes into his own under circumstances which to most people appear the very heights of morbid folly. But I can only set down my impressions. Here was Algy, in one sense the same as he had always been, a natural and slightly clumsy young man; in another sense entirely different. Few things are more dreary than dried seaweed; and few things more delightful than seaweed in its proper element, alert and sensitive to its furthest fringe.)

He asked a few questions about his people, extremely quietly.

"I am going to Crowston to-day," I said. "They've asked me to stay the night."

"Give them my love," said Algy.

Then he asked whether the engagement between *Harold* and Sybil had been recognized.

"You know he'll make an excellent landlord," said Algy, smiling.

"I suppose so," I said. "And Sybil Markham will do very well, from what I've seen of her."

"She's charming," said Algy. "Then the engagement's recognized?"

I told him yes; but that the marriage would be delayed until Algy's own profession.

"And Miss Maple?" he said quite simply.

"I have not seen her," I said diplomatically, "since I was at Crowston last year"; and he was content with that, fortunately.

I asked him then about the life; and he described it to me, with the special regulations made for novices, the manner in which they were particularly looked after and guarded against depression and morbidity: he spoke of his novice-master with affection.

"And what do they say of your own prospects?" I asked.

He smiled.

"They say nothing at all," he said.

"But you are happy?"

Then his eyes opened a little; and while he spoke, it was as if the old Algy were almost back again. His humanity slid back into himself as he spoke of the extraordinary content that had come to him. He implied that he had been initiated — that he under-

stood the point of things at last. . . . I knew what he meant. There come moments to every man, I suppose, when this is so, when every faculty, so to speak, is at rest in its object, when personality fits life as a key a lock, when life closes gently round personality and each explains and understands perfectly the other. It is not that one knows the answer to everything, but rather that there is an answer to everything so adequate and yet so transcendent that there is room for nothing but content. That man is happy who finds it so in his course of life; it is the best sign of a fulfilled vocation; but the souls of Contemplatives, I think, have it more completely and continuously than the souls of any others. Algy, at least, had found it.

I said good-bye to him after a few minutes; and had a word or two with the Prior before leaving.

Then I went silently out of the gate, with a huge envy in my heart, and climbed into the dog-cart that waited.

All the way in the cross-country train journey to Crowston I was thinking of Algy. I had to wait an hour or two at Brighton, and still, as I walked in the hot streets, I thought of Algy. I was thinking over all the times I had seen him since our first meeting in the London streets, under the mystical dawn so long ago. That dawn, surely, had been full of omen. Even then he had shown, though it was only

beneath the stress of a very sentimental and unreal human love, that instinct for solitude that had led him now so far. I had patronized him then as he walked beside me in his white frieze coat; I was far from patronizing him now in his white frieze of another cut. I suppose it is rather superstitious to dwell on such details; but I am not quite sure.

I reached Crowston station at about four, and the house a few minutes later, and waited in the hall a little while, while Mrs. Banister was found. Then I was conducted out to the cedar tree where tea was laid.

Really these people were charmingly friendly and broad-minded. There was Harold, looking very spruce and cheerful in gray flannel with a rose in his buttonhole, who handed me tea and hot cakes; there was Mrs. Banister, very particular as to whether I took two lumps of sugar or one: we had quite a pleasant little argument as to whether the general sugariness of a first cup did not make sugar in a second cup unnecessary, if proportions were to be observed. There was Mr. Banister himself, in gray tweed, who pressed upon me a cigar after tea, describing to me with considerable though dignified humor how he obtained them through a friend. There were one or two other people there, too, of no importance — I have even forgotten their names —

but they were nice, though suspicious. Mr. Mortimer was there, in a black coat and waistcoat with white flannel trousers. A racquet lay beside his chair. He regarded me as one strange dog regards another — he mentally walked on tip-toe, stiff-legged, with his frill expanded; but his words were smooth as oil; and he seemed to me a very earnest and sincere man. And, lastly, there was Lady Brasted who gave me an understanding look whenever our eyes met.

Mrs. Banister, Harold and myself strolled slowly off after tea in the direction of the village; it was understood that Mr. Banister's conversation should be administered to me later. They asked questions, of course, and I answered them. I described what Algy had to eat and what his cell looked like and how the hours of the day and night were spent. Harold heard all in silence, and his mother with an occasional gentle clicking of the tongue. I could see that it was as if I described a lunatic asylum. She was sincerely sorry for the poor boy.

"I hope he has plenty to eat," she said.

I was silent a moment; then I looked at her, and in that instant I saw real motherly tenderness and fear surge up in her eyes as she read my answer.

"They are very particular about health," I said awkwardly.

"But — but do you mean —?"

"Well; I am afraid most people would not think it sufficient. But, you know, they live to a great age generally. It seems to suit them."

She said no more; but I began to understand better how hard it is to conquer nature. I knew quite well that this motherly woman would have had her bad moments as she thought of her son — of the body she had borne and nursed. . . . I was thankful that she had no great powers of imagination; and I determined I would say even less than I had intended upon the physical hardships of St. Hugh's — above all not one word of the little scourge. I wondered, too, more than ever, what she would say if she could know of what had passed at Esher and of her son's awakening. But then she never would know.

We went down as far as the churchyard gate, through the glorious evening sunshine, seeing the great cool woods above us on our left, fringed with scurrying rabbits — where Algy had dreamed — and the village roofs on our right clustering round the little Norman church. It was all very feudal and opulent and important. A child in a Tam-o'-Shanter, carrying a basket of eggs up to the Great House, stopped and ducked to Mrs. Banister's benignant smile.

At the gate of the churchyard we stood a moment or two in silence. Three yards away rose up an

immense white marble cross on which I could see the words "Theodore, beloved son of," and then a fringe of pink roses hid the names of his parents. She looked at it gently and quietly; then she sighed to herself as she turned away. I think she was comparing her two elder sons. Yet, after all, she had nothing much to complain of from the Banister standpoint. Harold was all that could be wished.

I understood well enough by now why it was they had taken it so quietly on the whole and why they were so indulgent to myself. Even if Algy had never become a Catholic, he would have been but a poor master of Crowston, whereas now he had almost atoned for his faith by his departure.

Harold himself made a very pleasant impression on me. He was extremely nice-looking and extremely courteous: he hid the contempt, which I knew he felt for his poor brother, quite admirably.

Mr. Banister himself met us as we re-entered the garden, a fine sauntering figure of a man, and a few of the details had to be repeated for his benefit; while Harold turned off in the direction of the house. I knew later why he had gone, when I met Sybil at dinner.

Dinner was as you may expect. We talked of everything under the sun except what was in our minds. I had an excellent opportunity of studying the future mistress of Crowston, and I found her de-

lightful. She was exceedingly pretty, wholesome, and well-behaved. In fact, it was almost my only opportunity, for she vanished when we came into the drawing-room afterwards, simultaneously with Harold, and I perceived them three minutes later in the garden that was now darkening beyond the windows. They made a splendid pair and were radiantly happy.

I got a private word or two with Lady Brasted, under cover of some music contributed by one of the unimportant persons whose names I have forgotten.

"What is Miss Maple doing?" I asked.

Lady Brasted put her head on one side. Then she shook it gently, like a swaying flower, and a little touch of sharpness came into her face.

"Poor child," she said, "she is abroad with her aunt."

"I heard that she is not a Catholic after all; and that she is engaged to be married."

"I believe that is so," said Lady Brasted.

"To a Manchester merchant?"

She nodded discreetly and sadly; but she spoilt it all by immediately adding:

"Of course it is all very beautiful about the dear boy. I do so hope that he has found his true vocation;" by which I understood her to mean that she hoped he had not, and that he would be thoroughly miserable.

"The Prior seems to have no doubt about it," I said.

"Ah, well!"

She confided in me no more; I was plainly a bungler in the *affaire Algy,* though not a positive criminal like Dick. I mentioned that priest's name once to her, but never again. . . .

We went off to the smoking-room presently, and there I observed the ritual which Algy had described to me with such accuracy. We all sat in a semicircle, our host in his pontifical chair on the right of the empty fireplace, with the whisky and syphons beside him, Harold on the leather couch, and that man next him, and I in the place of honor on the left. I smoked a cigarette or two to Mr. Banister's cigar; we spoke of undenominational country affairs and of Westminster Cathedral and of the village schools. At the moment appointed in the ritual, whisky was dispensed; and at a minute or two before eleven the other guest disturbed all the ceremonies by begging leave to go to bed. But it gave Mr. Banister his opportunity.

"Poor boy!" he said abruptly, when the footsteps had died away; and he drew the last few rich breaths from his cigar. "But you say he is happy?"

"Very happy indeed," I answered.

"Well, well."

He glanced across at Harold with infinite complacency, laying his cigar end in the little tray at his elbow.

"Perhaps it's all for the best," he added. "You won't misunderstand me, Father Benson, when I say that he always was something like the fool of the family?"

"I understand perfectly," I said truthfully.

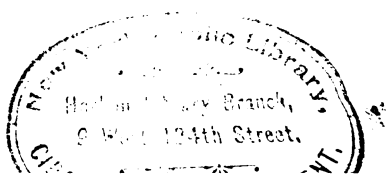
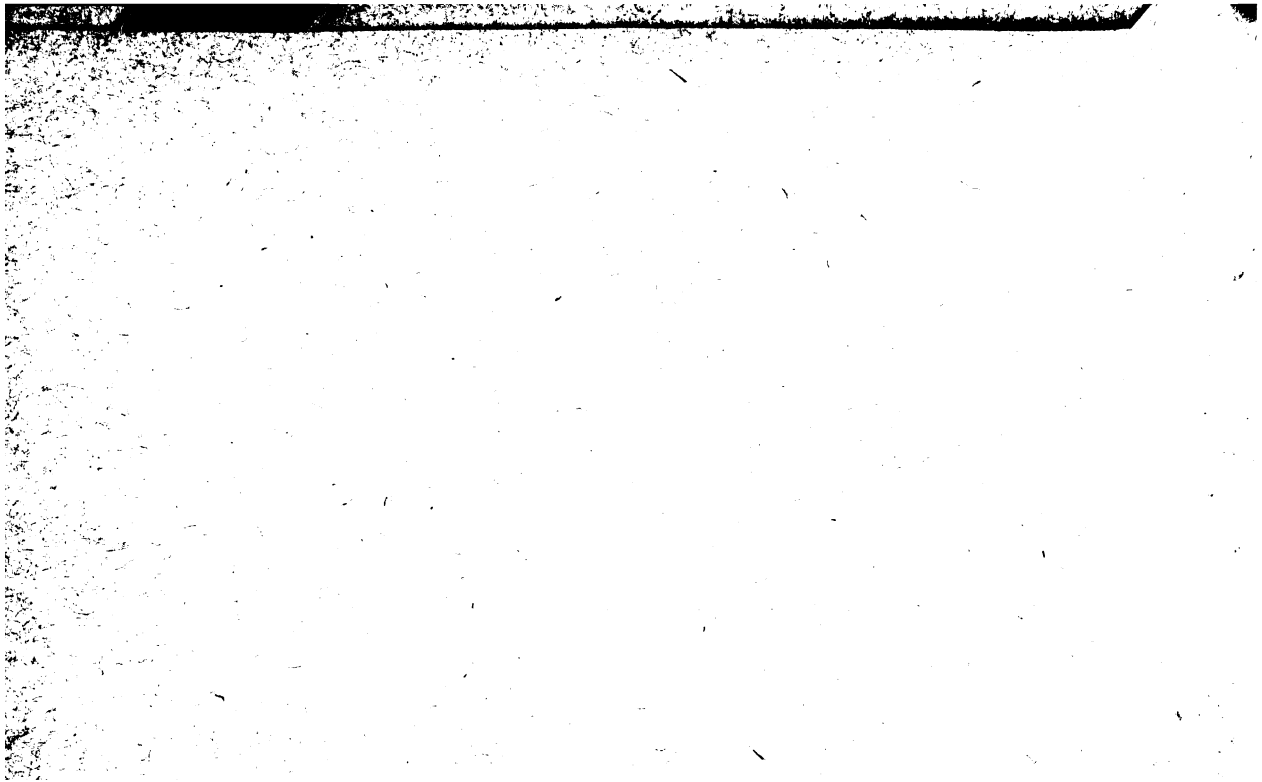
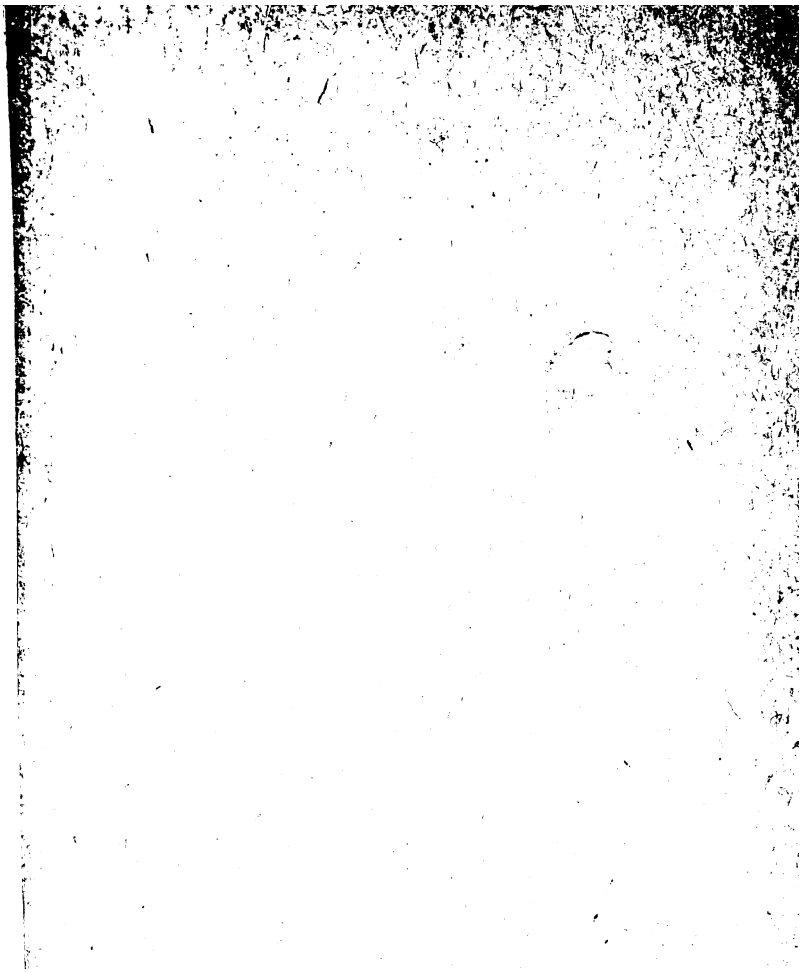
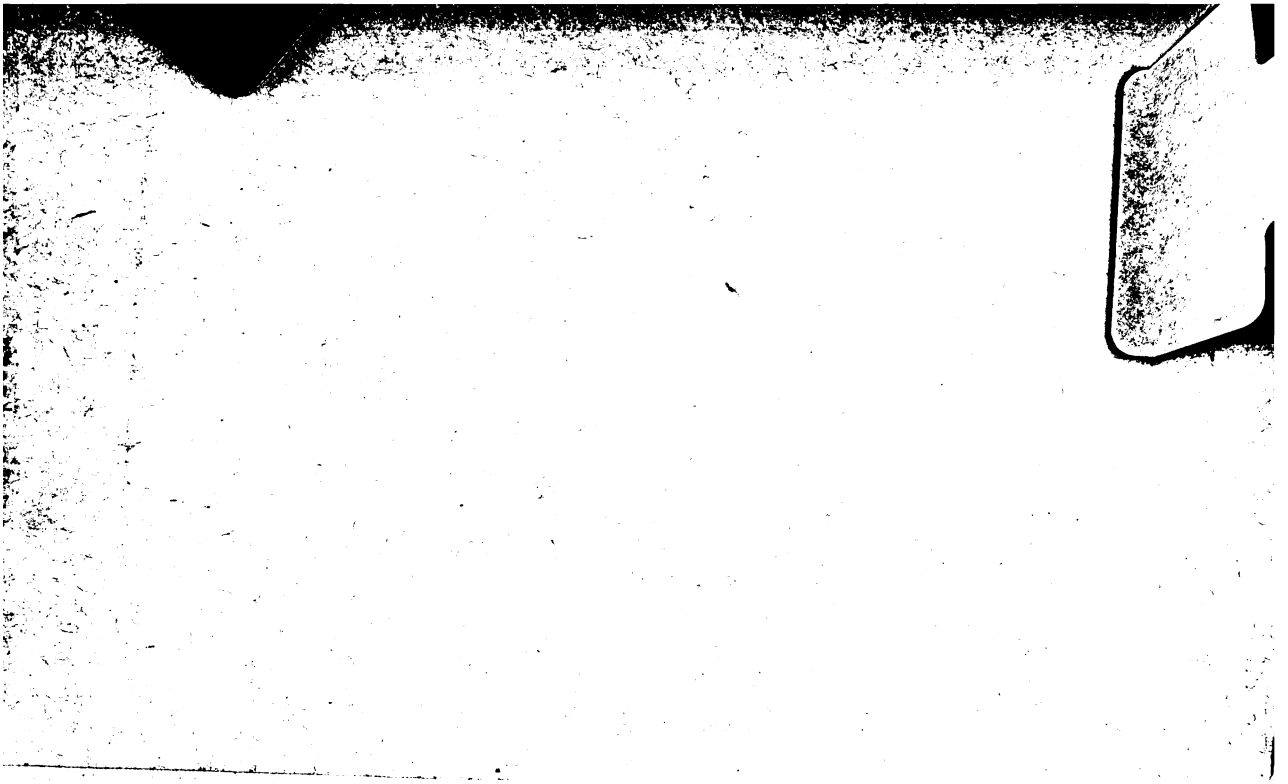
There was a pause. Then he glanced at the clock, sighed, rather too deliberately I thought, and pronounced the formula.

"Well — shall we be turning in?" he said.

I, too, glanced at the clock. It was on the stroke of the hour; and Algy at this moment, I knew, was entering the great church with his lantern. He had gone to bed as we went to dinner: now he was rising from his first sleep for his two or three hours prayer, as we prepared to sleep. . . .

"With all my heart," I said, rising.

THE END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